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Brazil striker Neymar, who has struggled with injuries in recent seasons, says he may retire by end of '26, P 18

India must make critical chips, says PM

PM Narendra Modi Saturday said India's development depended on making critical chips at home and creating a trusted supply chain for the world. He remotely laid the foundation stone of India Chip — a joint venture between HCL Group and Taiwanese major Foxconn. "A developed India can only be achieved when the country becomes self-reliant," he said. P 12

Agartala-Dhaka bus service likely to resume soon

Three days after Tarique Rahman assumed office as Bangladesh's PM, trial runs of the Agartala-Dhaka direct bus service have rolled, signalling possible resumption of commercial operations. A luxury bus covering a distance of 155km from Dhaka arrived in Agartala through the Akhaura Integrated Checkpost on Friday and returned to Dhaka on Saturday. TNN

Defiant Trump ups global tariffs to 15%, narrows gains for India

After Slapping 10% Duty Within Hrs Of SC Verdict, Hikes It Further

Times News Network

New Delhi: Within hours of the US Supreme Court striking down his global tariffs as illegal, US President Donald Trump imposed 10% global duty on imports into the US, and then raised it to 15% within another few hours, invoking an alternative law — Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974.

While Indian exporters cheered Friday's court ruling, the 10% gave them some advantage compared to the 25% reciprocal tariff they were subjected to. But compared to the 18% India and US have agreed to under the bilateral trade framework, the 15% shrinks the relief. The revised global tariff, which will be applied over and above the product-specific or MFN rate, gives most countries a small advantage since most of them are in the 15-20% band.

Amid the fast-paced developments, govt was guarded in its response. "We have noted the US Supreme Court judgment on tariffs yesterday (late Friday). President Trump has also addressed a press conference in that regard. Some steps have been announced by the US administration. We are studying all these developments for their implications," the commerce department said in a statement issued 18 hours after Trump's response.

Within hours of Supreme Court's 6-3 ruling against reciprocal tariffs, Trump issued an executive order invoking Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974, which enables him to impose duties without having to seek the approval of US Congress.

▶Can impose duties, P 12

GoI TO WAIT & WATCH; OTHERS ON MOVE

European Union | The bloc, which faced a 15% levy, to hold **emergency meeting Monday to reassess pending trade deal with US**. French president Emmanuel Macron says, 'We'll look closely at consequences and adapt'

UK | Given lowest reciprocal rate at 10%, says it **will work with Trump admin to understand the impact of the SC verdict** on the bilateral relationship

Indonesia | Finalised deal on Feb 19, with 19% duty on American exports. Says it's monitoring court decision and Trump's subsequent tariff move

Malaysia | Yet to ratify its trade pact, says it's waiting for clarity on the developments

Canada | Ruling brings no relief but Canada says SC **reinforced the country's position that the tariffs were illegal**

Mexico | Economy minister Marcelo Ebrard **plans to travel to US next week**

Brazil | Tariffs were at 50%. Says new tariff **won't affect its competitiveness** on trade

Trump attacks US cos, attorney with India ties

In his unprecedented attack on the US Supreme Court following its tariff ruling, President Trump did not spare the plaintiffs who questioned the duties, among them Chicago-based toy seller Learning Resources, which imports toys, STEM kits, and classroom supplies from India. Trump also appeared to be referring to Neal Katyal, an Indian-American attorney who argued the case before the SC representing Learning Resources and other plaintiffs. **Inside Jkt**

Delhi Declaration: 86 nations back India's 'AI for All' push

Pak, Chip Giant Taiwan Not On List Of Signatories

Manash.Gohain
@timesofindia.com

New Delhi: The AI Impact Summit concluded here with the adoption of the New Delhi Declaration marking the success of the push by India and other countries in the Global South to frame artificial intelligence as a shared global good rather than an exclusive technological advantage of the rich and developed.

Endorsed by 86 countries and two organisations, the declaration sets out a shared global vision for what it calls "collaborative, trusted, resilient and efficient" artificial intelligence, whose potential can be realised only "only when its benefits are shared by humanity" and cautioning that "the choices that we make today will shape the AI-enabled world that future generations will inherit".

Signatories span the AI powerhouses of the US and China as well as other technology leaders like the Netherlands, South Korea and the EU. Significantly, Pakistan does not figure in the list. Taiwan, the leading semiconductor manufacturer, appeared to have been left out because of sensitivities of China, which has blocked its presence on international fora.

Rooted in the principle of "Sarvajan Hitaya, Sarvajan Sukhaya" — welfare and happiness for all — a theme PM Modi articulated Thursday, the declaration places equity and access at the centre of AI governance, and commits participants to "foster shared understanding, while respecting national sovereignty on how AI could be made to serve humanity". For many developing countries, this emphasis addresses long-standing concerns about technology rules being shaped without their participation.

▶Seven action pillars, P 12

India & Brazil sign rare earths treaty as PM meets Lula, will study tariff impact

PM Modi met Brazilian President Lula Saturday and signed a pact for cooperation on rare earths and critical minerals, bilateral trade target of $30 billion by 2030 and Global South solidarity in technology. The two also agreed that they needed to study the implications of US SC striking down Trump tariffs. Brazil joined India in condemning cross-border terrorism, including Pahalgam and Red Fort. P 7

Know Namma Karnataka?

SCAN THE O!

Scan the QR & answer the quiz question. Correct answer will be revealed tomorrow!

Yesterday's answer: Ramachandra Guha

16 held for stealing gold-ore mud at KGF

Police arrested 16 people, many of them women, for trespassing into restricted mining areas near KGF and stealing gold ore-mixed mud to extract traces of the metal. Two incidents on Feb 6 and 10 led to arrests after guards alerted police to the attempted thefts. P 4

Intel warns of strikes in Delhi, security upped

New Delhi: Security agencies in Delhi have heightened security following intelligence reports suggesting a possible terror plan aimed at crowded religious and heritage sites.

According to inputs, the Pakistan-based militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) is reportedly planning IED attacks in major cities across India, including a temple in Chandni Chowk, as retaliation for an attack on a mosque in Islamabad on Feb 6.

The alert comes three months after a blast near the same temple in the vicinity of Red Fort led to 15 deaths. TNN

▶Patrolling up, P 12

Jarkiholi meets Kharge, says CM issue to be resolved soon

Times News Network

New Delhi/Bengaluru: Public works department (PWD) minister **Satish Jarkiholi** said Saturday the Congress high command has made up its mind on whether there will be a change of chief minister in Karnataka and that a formal announcement on this will be made soon.

"It isn't clear whether there will be a change of CM. We have told the high command to take a final call on that. He [AICC chief Mallikarjun Kharge] responded positively, and said everything will be sorted out soon," Jarkiholi said. Reacting to his statement, deputy CM D K Shivakumar said in Bengaluru he was "happy to hear that".

Jarkiholi and former minister K N Rajanna, both considered loyal to Siddaramaiah, met Kharge in Delhi and held discussions for about half an hour. Jarkiholi later said they discussed the tussle in state between rival supporters of Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar over the issue of CM post and urged the leadership to resolve the imbroglio soon.

Both Jarkiholi and Rajanna, however, clarified that they neither discussed changing the state Congress president, a post held by Shivakumar, nor did they talk about a cabinet reshuffle.

▶No info on statement, P 4

K'taka MLA held for taking bribe from contractor

Gadag: Lokayukta police on Saturday caught Chandru Lamani, BJP MLA from Shirahatti, Gadag district, while allegedly accepting a Rs 5 lakh bribe from a contractor. A team led by SP Siddalingappa raided his Balaji Hospital in Laxmeshwar and detained him.

According to sources, contractor Vijay Pujar, a Class-1 contractor, alleged that the MLA demanded an 11% commission for a Rs 1 crore retaining wall construction in Sankadal village.

During the raid, Lamani's govt PA Manjunath Walmiki and private PA Guru Lamani were also caught, the sources added. TNN

▶MLA's PAs threw ₹1L, P 4

Counselling-only transfers to curb graft, middlemen menace: CM

Times News Network

Bengaluru: Chief minister Siddaramaiah Saturday said transfers and appointments in key govt departments are being carried out strictly through a transparent counselling process to curb corruption and eliminate the growing menace of middlemen.

Speaking after handing out appointment letters to about 1,000 new recruits in health & family welfare department here, the CM said govt had conducted nearly 5,700 transfers, including those of doctors, through counselling to prevent malpractice. "These new appointments have also been made through counselling so that corruption does not take place," he said.

The CM cautioned new recruits against using intermediaries. "Do not go to anyone for transfers. Agents have started operating and they demand money, even trying to route payments to officials. Such practices must stop," he warned.

Stating that there are more than 2.5 lakh vacant posts across govt departments, Siddaramaiah said they would be filled in phases, with priority for education, health and police. He also underlined the public service mandate of the health sector.

▶Recruitment board, P 4

DOCS AMONG 5,700 TRANSFERRED

- 5,700 transfers, including of doctors, **conducted through counselling**
- **1,000 recruited** in health and family welfare department, **also via counselling**
- CM says there are **2.5L vacant posts across govt departments** & will be filled in phases, with priority for education, health and police
- **Cautions new recruits against approaching agents.** 'Such practices must stop,' he says

B'desh nationals living in TN held

Delhi Police's Q branch arrested six Bangladeshis allegedly living and working illegally in Tamil Nadu's Tirupur on charges of posting social media messages supporting Pakistan-based terror outfits. Eight cellphones and 16 SIM cards were seized. TNN

Woman loses ₹3cr in 2-mth digital arrest

Cybercrooks claiming to be CBI officers probing a laundering case allegedly put a woman (70) in Dehradun under digital arrest and stole Rs 3cr. It happened between Sept 1 and Oct 30 last year and the woman filed a complaint Friday. P 8

1.2L to get toll refund after 32-hr Maha e-way jam

Pune: At least 1.2 lakh commuters, caught in 32-hour traffic gridlock on Mumbai-Pune expressway on Feb 3, will get a refund for the toll they were charged, Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation (MSRDC) officials said Saturday. The traffic jam occurred after a gas tanker turned on its side near Khopoli, **reports Nisha Nambiar**.

The refunds, totalling Rs 5.36cr, would cover both expressway and Pune-Bengaluru highway. "The refund will be issued in FASTag accounts in coming week," an MSRDC official told **TOI**.

▶Activist groups, P 12

GBA auctions 7 properties in crackdown on ₹437cr tax dues

Hamsaveni.N@timesofindia.com

Bengaluru: Watch out if you have not yet cleared your property tax dues with Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA). You could lose your cherished unit through a public auction.

In a first-of-its-kind crackdown on defaulters, GBA on Saturday auctioned off seven properties in the East and North City Corporation limits to recover long-pending tax arrears.

Despite repeated notices and recovery drives by the erstwhile BBMP and the five newly formed corporations under GBA, thousands of property owners continue to default on tax payments. With tax dues touching Rs 437 crore across nearly 7,000 units in the city, civic authorities have turned to property auction as a last resort.

Of the 25 properties listed for auction in East, 107 in North and 40 in Central, five of them in East and two in North were auctioned off, while those in Central failed to attract bidders.

▶As bidding began, P 2

FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND CRACKDOWN

- **172 units listed for auction:** 25 (East), 107 (North), 40 (Central)
- 7 properties auctioned on Saturday — **5 in East, 2 in North**
- **In K R Puram division alone, 25 defaulter properties** were put up for bidding, including one that's valued at ₹17.9 crore
- As auctions began, **19 of 25 owners in KR Puram cleared their dues**

7,000 No. of units under GBA yet to pay ₹437 crore in property tax arrears

Manipur MLA dies of injuries from '23 attack

Churachandpur: Vungzagin Valte, BJP MLA from Thanlon in Manipur's Churachandpur who was ambushed and assaulted by a mob in Imphal at the start of the ethnic violence on May 4, 2023, died Saturday in a Gurugram hospital after prolonged treatment, **reports M K Henry**. He was 61.

The Kuki-Zo MLA is the state's first lawmaker to lose his life in the strife. Valte, an ex-minister, was returning from a meeting with the then CM N Biren Singh when his convoy was ambushed. He had suffered severe head injuries.

▶Valte's interventions, P 12

Pvt univs file more patents but IITs, IISc win more nods

Hemali.Chhapia
@timesofindia.com

Mumbai: India's research story in higher education is often told through the rise in patent applications. However, a closer reading of data—from the India Patent Office for 2020-2025—suggests a more uncomfortable reality: the system increasingly rewards activity, not outcomes.

The Indian Institutes of Technology collectively filed for 6,558 patents and got 2,808, an approval rate of 43%. The premier Indian Institute of Science mirrors this trajectory, as do the NITs, reports Hemali Chhapia.

Now compare this with high-volume private universities. Lovely Professional University leads in numbers with 7,096 patent applications over five years. Yet only 164 granted, a success rate of 2.3%. The IITs presented 3,331 patent publications and got 2,118 patents, pushing the success rate to 64%.

▶No academic exercise, P 12

The IITs presented 3,331 patent publications and got 2,118 patents, pushing the success rate to 64%. IISc successfully converted 257 of its 379 applications in 2020-2023, showing an approval rate of nearly 68%

Ctrl+Alt+Elite: Microsoft hands Xbox controls to Asha Sharma

Chidanand Rajghatta | TNN

Washington: In a sweeping reset during Xbox's 25th anniversary year, the Satya Nadella-led Microsoft has named Asha Sharma as CEO of Microsoft Gaming, pitching another Indian-American into a leadership position at a time of intense xenophobia in MAGA circles. Wisconsin-born Sharma, 43, succeeds Phil Spencer, the widely admired Xbox chief who is retiring after nearly four decades at the company.

Sharma most recently served as president of CoreAI at Microsoft, where she led efforts to embed advanced models into the company's cloud and developer stack. Before returning to Microsoft, where she had an earlier stint, Sharma was COO at Instacart, helping steer the delivery platform through its IPO and a volatile post-pandemic reset. Earlier, at Meta, she oversaw product and engineering for Facebook Messenger and Instagram Direct, guiding communications products used by billions.

▶Nadella praises, Inside Jkt

NEW AVATAR FOR MS GAMING

- A graduate of Carlson School of Management at Univ of Minnesota, Sharma's resume reads like a map of the modern tech economy: marketplaces, social platforms, cloud, and AI

- Sharma (43) **vows to 'earn right to be trusted'**, promises 'return of Xbox', insists company won't chase short-term efficiencies or **flood ecosystem with 'soulless AI slop'**
- Appt ignites debate across gaming forums and social media, **critics say she lacks direct experience in game devpt**
- Some **MAGA-aligned voices recycle claims** of corporate nepotism, cast Sharma as part of 'Indian tech-bro' archetype

QUEENS OF OZ AFTER 10 YRS

An entertaining century stand between Smriti Mandhana and Jemimah Rodrigues (in pic with bowler Shreyanka Patil) powered India to a 17-run win over Australia in the third and final women's T20I in Adelaide Saturday, sealing their first bilateral T20I series triumph against the formidable rivals since 2016. Mandhana smashed 82 off 55, with 8 fours and 3 sixes, while her bestie struck 59 off 46 as the two stitched a commanding 121-run stand to propel India to 176/6 after electing to bat.

India's bowlers then seized control as young spinner Patil (3/22) and pace spearhead Renuka Singh (1/29) ripped through the top order to leave Australia reeling at 32/3. The early strikes set the tone for a dominant display as India eventually restricted the hosts to 159/9 | Report on P 17

Riverbank bash near Hampi on day of rape-murder verdict sparks case

Chamaraj Savadi | TNN

Koppal: On the very day a court in Gangavathi pronounced the death penalty against three men convicted in the Sanapur rape-murder case, an alleged illegal party involving foreign tourists was held at a private riverside resort located close to the crime scene and in an eco-sensitive zone near the Unesco World Heritage Site of Hampi.

The event was reportedly held on Feb 16 on the banks of Tungabhadra river, between Anegundi and Hampi. The resort in Gangavathi taluk hosted hundreds of foreign tourists who were seen dancing to loud music, while holding liquor bottles, video clips of which went viral on social media, triggering a police crackdown. Acting on viral footage, police filed a case against resort owner Piyush Parmar and manager Huligesh. Cops said the party was organised without permission, disregarding environmental and regulatory norms.

▶Without permission, P 5

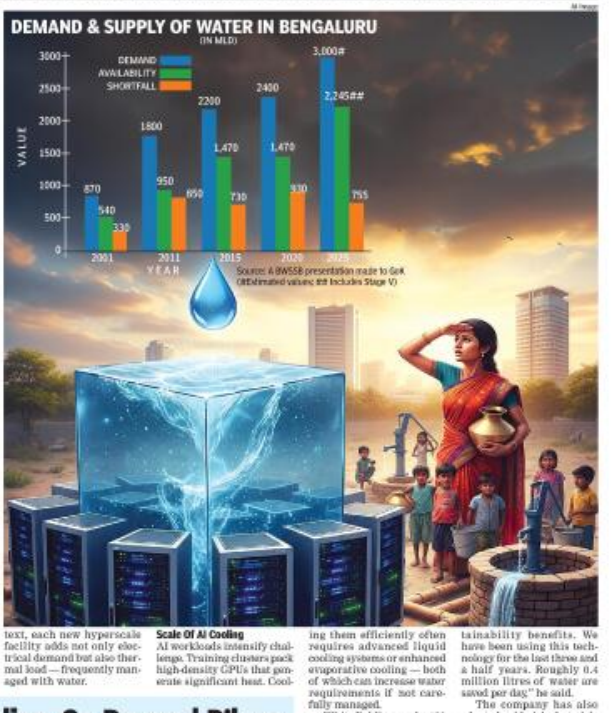
The party involving foreign tourists took place not far from the spot where an Israeli tourist was gang raped in March last year

India's Tech Capital's Data Centre Ambitions Depend On A Resource The City Can Barely Supply. **Chethan Kumar, Vindhya Pabolu & Anush S** Do A Deep Dive

Building Servers In A THIRSTY CITY

BENGALURU'S SHARE

- Bengaluru has 31 of Karnataka's 32 data centres
- 18 of them have a cumulative capacity of 292 MW (others haven't made it public)
- According to Deloitte, 1 MW data centre consumes roughly 68,500 litres of water per day. A 20 MW facility would, therefore, require approx. 1.37 million litres daily
- Average four-member household consumes between 350 and 500 litres every day



In a city already facing a daily water deficit, the rapid rise of data centres — the physical backbone of cloud computing and artificial intelligence — presents a difficult question: how should the metropolis accommodate one of the most resource-intensive forms of digital infrastructure?

Bengaluru is already a data centre hub, and its footprint is set to expand. Karnataka IT minister Priyank Kharge told TOI that of the 32 operational data centres in the state, 31 are concentrated in Bengaluru. "Ten more facilities are in the pipeline," he said.

Outside these 32, only a handful of smaller centres operate in cities such as Mysuru. Bengaluru, however, remains the clear epicentre.

TIMES *Special*

Whitefield alone hosts seven major facilities with nearly 120 MW of capacity, including large campuses developed by global operators.

Electronics City has positioned itself as an AI-ready hub. Narasimha Agrahara, home to 67.2 MW hyperscale facility, anchors one of the state's largest deployments, while Bidrahalli and Bidadi are emerging as peripheral data centre zones. With companies expanding AI research operations here, at least eight data centres explicitly describe themselves as "AI-ready" or "AI data centres", underscoring the computational intensity of workloads they are designed to handle.

But as megawatts increase, so do megalitres.

Water Paradox

Data centres consume electricity to power servers — and water to cool them. Most large facilities rely on evaporative-cooling systems, where water absorbs heat and is lost as vapour. According to Deloitte's most recent study, 1 MW data centre needs 68,500 litres of water a day. A 20 MW facility — common among newer AI-focused campuses — would, therefore, require approximately 1.4 million litres daily.

That's equivalent to daily water needs of around 27,000 urban households, based on average per-household consumption norms. The paradox is stark: a city struggling to secure drinking water must also secure cooling water for server farms that power global cloud services.

A City Counting Every Drop

In several parts of the city, residents track tanker arrivals like train schedules and budget for water the way they would for school fees.

Each day, the city requires between 2,600 and 3,000 million litres of water for domestic and industrial use. Around 2,000 MLD is pumped from the Cauvery, with the remaining drawn largely from borewells. A significant share of the city's 14,000 govt borewells have already run dry.

Adding to the strain, nearly a quarter of Cauvery water is lost as unaccounted flow. A BWSSB projection presented to the govt estimates the daily shortfall at 775 MLD, even after Cauvery Stage V becomes fully operational. In Sadaramangala near ITPL, Ananthakrishnan Jayaraman says his 96-house community received Cauvery water only in Sept 2025. "A single tanker load costs Rs 2,000 to Rs 2,500, rising to Rs 4,000 in peak summer. Last year, we used 10 to 12 tankers a day," he said. Hard water has forced many to install central and household softening systems costing up to Rs 1.2 lakh.

Near Electronics City, Kalesh Kumar says his 210-unit apartment complex relies fully on tankers, requiring two to three loads daily during summer. Though pipelines have been laid, Cauvery water is yet to reach them. "Larger complexes with 2,000 or 3,000 flats would face even greater stress," he said. "Data centres should ideally be located in water-abundant regions, not in a hilltop city."

Hydrologist Shashank Palur of Well Labs estimates that data centres can consume roughly 26 million litres per megawatt annually. At city-scale capacities, cumulative daily demand could run into tens of millions of litres — equivalent to the needs of over a lakh people. Many facilities rely on groundwater or tanker supply, as industrial water from BWSSB is relatively expensive. Palur argues that the solution lies in shifting to treated water.

"Bengaluru has excess treated water that can be reused for cooling, but current incentives prioritise rapid approvals over water sustainability. With capacity expected to double by 2030 and recent tax incentives accelerating growth, policy must push water-intensive sectors away from freshwater use," he said.

Vishwanath S of Biome Environmental Trust notes that environmental clearances require disclosure of water demand and sources, ideally limiting use to tertiary treated wastewater. "If it is groundwater, that is not sustainable," he said.

Unlike coastal hubs, Bengaluru lacks direct access to submarine cable-landing stations and large water sources. Its inland geography compounds infrastructure pressures: data traffic must route through port cities and water must be pumped, treated and often transported over long distances. In this context, each new hyperscale facility adds not only electrical demand but also thermal load — frequently managed with water.

Scale Of AI Cooling

AI workloads intensify challenges. Training clusters pack high-density GPUs that generate significant heat. Cooling them efficiently often requires advanced liquid cooling systems or enhanced evaporative cooling — both of which can increase water requirements if not carefully managed.

Whitefield's nearly 120 MW of installed capacity offers a glimpse of cumulative demand. Even a portion of that capacity operating at full load implies millions of litres of daily cooling requirement.

As operators deploy facilities exceeding 40MW — hyperscale threshold typically associated with global cloud providers — the issue isn't whether water demand will rise, but how it will be managed.

What Firms Are Doing

Some firms have begun rethinking cooling architecture. Datasamudra's 5MW facility in Kodigehalli uses air-cooled chillers instead of conventional water-cooled systems, reducing water demand by nearly 70%, according to COO Balaji Rajagopal.

"Shifting from water-cooled to air-cooled chillers is only about a 2–3% difference in operational cost, but it gives long-term sustainability benefits. We have been using this technology for the last three and a half years. Roughly 0.4 million litres of water are saved per day," he said.

The company has also adopted cold aisle–hot aisle containment systems, cooling only server rows instead of entire rooms, improving both energy and water efficiency. Emerging technologies may reduce water use even further.

Elsewhere in India, a joint venture between Brookfield Infrastructure and Reliance Industries has demonstrated zero-water data centre operations by deploying closed-loop air-cooled systems that eliminate evaporative cooling. Such designs rely on advanced chillers and heat exchange systems rather than water-intensive cooling towers.

Closer home, Srinivas Varadarajan, CEO and co-founder of Vigyanlabs Innovations in Mysuru, said: "...Traditionally, one relies on water for cooling, needing about two litres of clean water for every kilowatt. We decided to build sustainable infrastructure that uses minimal water."

To Turn Green, K'taka To Revisit Policy, Go Beyond B'luru

Karnataka is preparing a policy course correction to make data centres and other emerging technology sectors more sustainable, in a bid to address concerns over the strain they place on water and energy resources — particularly in water-stressed Bengaluru.

IT minister **Priyank Kharge** said the govt is reworking its policy framework to balance its ambition of attracting investments in data centres, AI and other high-performing computer industries with environmental sustainability. "We can't progress if we aren't sustainable," he said, adding that the rethink goes beyond data centres to cover the broader spectrum of emerging technologies, including AI and other energy-intensive sectors.

Treated Water, Desalination?

Water consumption — particularly for cooling — is the other major concern driving the rethink. Kharge acknowledged that water is a critical challenge and said the govt is exploring multiple options to reduce reliance on potable water and groundwater. Among the measures under consideration: Use of secondary and tertiary treated wastewater for cooling; expansion and strengthening of treatment plants to ensure adequate supply of non-potable water to industries; exploring desalination as a supplementary source, and integrating water planning into broader infrastructure development.

"For cooling purposes you don't need potable water or groundwater," he said, but cautioned that there are no easy solutions. "It isn't an open-and-shut thing. We will have to put in a lot of effort to figure these things out," he said. Kharge said the govt has already held a couple of rounds of discussions involving the energy department and other relevant departments. A roundtable has also been held with data centre stakeholders at the Bengaluru Tech Summit (BTS), and further in-depth consultations are planned before a draft policy is released.

"We need to do an in-depth consultation again," he said, suggesting that the framework is still being shaped through stakeholder engagement.

A key pillar of the proposed course correction is the creation of dedicated renewable energy capacity for high-consumption industries. Kharge indicated that the state is examining the possibility of earmarking 15-20 gigawatts of green energy — generated from renewable sources — exclusively for emerging technology sectors such as AI and data centres.

Other Initiatives

"From a sustainability perspective, we are looking at innovations in water efficiency and utilisation, especially from the HVAC perspective in data centres. That is a continuous effort," Sanjeev Gupta, CEO, Karnataka Digital Economy Mission (KDEM), said.

On geographic diversification, Gupta said KDEM and the govt are shifting focus beyond Bengaluru to Mysuru, Mangaluru and other locations. KDEM had, in late 2025, even commissioned a feasibility study to leverage Mangaluru as a data centre hub, and is expected to woo industries to the coastal town this year.

Manual cleaning of dry leaves on roads amid fire risk turns uphill task

Hamsaveni.N
@timesofindia.com

Bengaluru: With summer setting in, Bengaluru is battling a familiar seasonal challenge: Roads carpeted with dry leaves and the looming risk of accidental fires.

As trees across the city shed foliage, Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) has stepped up preventive measures, directing sanitation workers to swiftly clear accumulated leaves from roads and footpaths.

However, residents are complaining about leaves being collected and dumped on footpaths. Sushmitha Kar, a resident of Jeevan Bima Nagar, alleged sanitation workers routinely dump collected leaves in front of her house after sweeping the streets. She said stagnant waste had earlier led to mosquito breeding in the area. "I lost my father-in-law to dengue, and we feel mosquito breeding in garbage dumps played a role. Now, neighbours are also worried that dry leaves could catch fire. I've reached out to officials requesting clearance, but there has been no response so far," she said.

Chetan Gopal K , a resident of east Bengaluru, said there is no proper garbage management in the area. "Many educated residents are burning leaves and garden waste instead of handing it over to vendors or composting it," he said.

Bengaluru Solid Waste Management Ltd (BSWML) has issued strict instructions to pourakarmikas to ensure proper collection and disposal. On a pilot basis, 48 leaf composting bins have been installed across various city corporations. "If pourakarmikas or residents find dry leaves, they can deposit them in these bins and sprinkle water so that composting begins," a BSWML official said. Larger-capacity composting units are operational in parks, where shredding and composting of leaves is mandatory.

In areas without composting bins, leaves are being transported to waste-processing plants. Officials said mechanical sweepers are being avoided for this task as they tend to collect mixed, unsegregated waste. Hence, manual collection is being encouraged.

Despite the efforts, supervisors on the ground admitted that clearing leaves has proved to be an uphill task. A supervisor from East city corporation said, "Even after cleaning, it feels like only 30% of the leaves are removed. If pourakarmikas clean one side of the road, fresh leaves keep falling on the same stretch." Authorities are also grappling with rising concerns over fire. "There is significant risk during this period as dry leaves can ignite easily. We are ensuring that no large dumps accumulate in neighbourhoods and are responding quickly to fire-related complaints," the supervisor added.

In Feb alone, BSWML recorded 242 rubbish-burning cases, which include incidents involving dry leaves. Of these, 158 cases were attended to and resolved by the civic agency.

For pourakarmikas on the ground, the situation is a recurring seasonal challenge. R Valarmathi, a pourakarmika from Malleswaram, said they grew accustomed to the routine. "For the next three months, this is common for us. It is extra work as we need to keep sweeping repeatedly. The leaves spread across roads, footpaths and corners, making it difficult to gather them. In another month, pink flowers will start falling, and sweeping them is even harder," she said.

Photo: Ayush Anil, TOI

MAKING A CLEAN SWEEP: Civic officials say cleaning roads manually is a challenge as leaves keep falling even after they are swept by the pourakarmikas

In Feb alone, BSWML recorded 242 rubbish-burning cases, which include incidents involving dry leaves. Of these, 158 cases were resolved by the agency

KR Pura MLA in judicial custody

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bengaluru: A special court for elected representatives in the city Saturday sent BJP MLA from KR Pura, BA Basavaraja, to six-day judicial custody in Bengaluru Central Prison.

Criminal Investigation Department sleuths produced the lawmaker before the special court as his police custody ended Saturday. CID police arrested Basavaraja on Feb 12 when he landed at Kempegowda International Airport from Ahmedabad, in connection with last year's murder of rowdy Bikku Shiva. The MLA was named as accused number five in the case.

B.Com student dies by suicide

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bengaluru: A 22-year-old B.Com student allegedly died by suicide at his house in Sanjoynagar shortly after Friday midnight. C Hemanth was a final-year student of a private college in Malleswaram.

Sources said his father, Chandru, works as a personal assistant (private) to former chief minister and Haveri MP Basavaraj Bommai. The incident came to light early Saturday morning when family members entered his room and found him hanging. Police said no death note was recovered from the scene.

According to family members, Hemanth had been scolded over certain issues, which they suspect may have led him to take the extreme step.

If you are experiencing distress or having suicidal thoughts, call Tele-MANAS at 14416 or 1800-891-4416, or Sahai Helpline at 080-25497777.

As bidding began, 19 property owners rushed to clear dues

UNDER HAMMER

- Five city corporations under GBA notified properties that were on tax default list for long, even after multiple notices to the owners and field visits by authorities
- "Only after multiple reminders were those properties put up for auction," said Munish Moudgil, GBA special commissioner (revenue). Bidders had to submit demand draft for ₹1 lakh prior to participation
- Winning bidder required to pay 15% of final bid amount on same day. Sale certificate will be issued within seven days, and within 45 days, property will be transferred and registered in name of successful bidder
- Once auctioned, original owner cannot reclaim the property, joint commissioner clarified

"I hadn't planned to buy a property today. I came here out of curiosity, but decided to participate in the bidding. It turned out to be a good deal. As builders and landlords, we are always looking for investment opportunities. Since this is a govt auction under GBA, we trust the process to be transparent, giving us the confidence to go ahead

Sandeep Shantakumar | RESIDENT, DINNAMANGALA

"It may be exciting for a buyer to pick up property at a good price, but it is painful for the original owner to lose it. Many of these units appear to belong to middle-class families. I hope the corporations take similar action against large builders and wealthy defaulters

Yele Srinivas | RESIDENT, KR PURA

"We are not going to stop until every paisa of tax due is recovered. Unpaid dues will eventually catch up with you. Why should 26% of defaulters burden the system when 80% of citizens are honestly paying their taxes?

Munish Moudgil | SPECIAL COMMISSIONER (REVENUE), GBA

▶ Continued from page 1

Taking a strong stand on property tax arrears, DCM DK Shivakumar said some former legislators own properties, collect rent, but fail to pay taxes. "If they are earning rent and not paying tax, what should the corporation do?"

TOI was present at the auction in East City Corporation. In KR Pura division, 25 defaulter properties — including one valued at Rs 12.9 crore, the highest on the list — were put under the hammer in the presence of joint commissioner Sudha. As bidding commenced, 19 property owners rushed to clear their dues. Eventually, five properties were sold. One was withdrawn after it was found to be encroaching on a storm-water drain.

HC: Form panel to protect Sarakki lake

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bengaluru: The high court directed the chief secretary to constitute a committee to protect and manage Sarakki lake in JP Nagar and to ensure removal of encroachments in the buffer zone.

A division bench of Chief Justice Vibhu Bakhru and Justice CM Poonacha said the committee must include a representative of GBA, deputy commissioner, Bengaluru Urban, a representative of Tank Development Authority and other stakeholders as required. It directed that a nodal officer be appointed from among the committee members.

The bench said the committee must be issued within three weeks. The panel must oversee and ensure that statutory authorities initiate action under the relevant statute to notify persons or entities who put up constructions in the buffer zone, and to take further action in accordance with law to clear or remove encroachments along with other measures to protect the lake.

The committee must send a report to the court within three months on action taken, the division bench said while disposing of a PIL filed by Sarakki Lake Improvement Trust. In its PIL filed in 2023, the petitioner sought directions to stop illegal constructions at a site situated at Jogruthi Colony, Puttenahalli, JP Nagar 7th Phase.

Honesty pays: When bus rider paid ₹62k for ticket

Extra Amount Refunded In 3 Cases With Staff's Aid

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bengaluru: Honest and prompt action by conductors of Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) drew praise after three separate incidents highlighted their integrity in handling passengers' money and valuables.

In one case on Jun 14, a senior citizen who boarded a city bus at Uttarahalli, travelling from Kengeri towards Banashankari, intended to pay Rs 4 through UPI using the QR code provided by the conductor. However, he accidentally transferred Rs 62,316. Shocked by the erroneous payment, the passenger immediately alerted conductor K Puttaswamy, who escalated the matter to his depot authorities.

Chandrakala BR, manager of Kengeri depot, said the passenger was advised to submit a written request along with relevant documents, including Aadhaar details and bank transaction proof. "After the conductor guided him, he submitted the relevant documents and, within a few days, the excess amount was refunded," she said.

On Dec 5, IT professional Niranjali mistakenly transferred Rs 84,000 while making a digital payment for a ticket to Electronics City on a bus that departed from Kengeri. After informing the conductor, she was guided to approach the depot with necessary documents.

Niranjali's excess amount was refunded promptly. She expressed gratitude to the conductor and staff for their quick assistance," the depot manager said.

In another incident, conductor Ganga S Pujari returned gold jewellery worth nearly Rs 10 lakh left behind by a passenger. The incident occurred while she was on duty on a bus operating from KR Market to Padmanabhanagar. A woman passenger who alighted at Basavanagudi accidentally left behind one of her bags. "After the bus left Basavanagudi, while issuing tickets, I noticed an unattended bag and asked passengers if it belonged to anyone. They said it did not. After some time, officials informed me that a woman approached the police station seeking help to trace the bag she left behind. Meanwhile, the woman boarded another bus from Basavanagudi and sought the help of its conductor, who contacted me as we know each other. At the last stop, we handed over the bag to her. She was very happy to receive her valuables back," she said.

Similarly, a woman travelling on a Vayu Vajra service to Kempegowda International Airport forgot her robotic vacuum cleaner while alighting. The crew traced her and returned the item.

On Saturday, transport minister Ramalinga Reddy felicitated the conductors and staff involved in these incidents, awarding them cash prizes and appreciation letters for their honest service.

On Jan 14, a senior citizen travelling from Kengeri towards Banashankari accidentally paid ₹62,316 through UPI instead of ₹5 for the ticket. Conductor K Puttaswamy escalated the matter to his depot authorities, which helped in prompt refund of the extra money to the bus passenger

Conductor Ganga S Pujari returned gold jewellery worth nearly ₹10 lakh left behind in a bag by a passenger in the bus operating from KR Market to Padmanabhanagar

Police dismiss boy kidnap rumour, warn against spreading false news

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bengaluru: A false report claiming a 10-year-old boy was kidnapped by two bike-borne men from Shikaripalya, south Bengaluru, and held captive in a house in Hebbagodi circulated widely on social media, triggering panic among parents and residents.

However, police commissioner Seemanth Kumar Singh told **TOI** the claim was baseless and that no such incident had been reported.

The social media post had claimed that a boy was kidnapped in Shikaripalya by two strangers who allegedly followed him from school, forced him onto their motorcycle and confined him in a house near Hebbagodi.

It further alleged that police tracked the suspects using a vehicle number, rescued the child, and that the incident was the fourth such kidnapping in 10 days, supposedly linked to organ theft in areas around Hebbagodi, Shikaripalya and Electronics City. The post urged parents to remain vigilant and warned them against allowing strangers to approach their children.

Police have clarified that the entire claim is fabricated and have registered a case against unidentified persons for spreading the false message. Urging parents and WhatsApp users not to pay heed to rumours, Singh said: "This particular report is baseless. It caused unnecessary panic. No such incidents happened, and our school-children are safe."

M Narayana, deputy commissioner of police, Electronics City division, told **TOI** they booked a case against an unknown person for uploading the post. "We will identify the person who created it. Legal action will be initiated against such mischief-mongers. We have also clarified on our official social media handles that the report about children being kidnapped is false," he said.

Blue Line: Bellandur Metro station gets ₹120-crore boost from Prestige

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

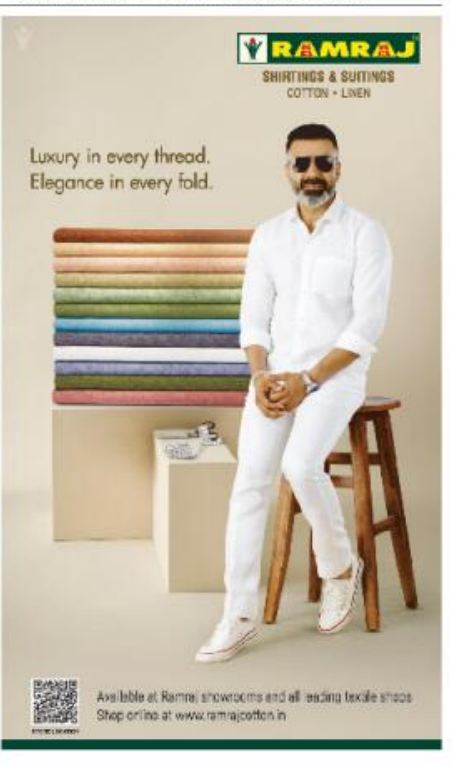
Bengaluru: Prestige Group entered into a definitive agreement with BMRCL to invest Rs 120 crore to adopt and co-brand Bellandur Metro station. The station is part of the under-construction Blue Line of Namma Metro, connecting KR Puram and Silk Board.

As per the agreement, the station will be renamed 'Prestige Bellandur Metro Station'. BMRCL set a deadline of Dec 2026 to open the 13km elevated Metro corridor along Outer Ring Road.

Under the agreement, Prestige Beta Projects Private Ltd will undertake station upgradation and enhancement works, provide infrastructure support and hold partnership rights for a 30-year concession period. The agreement also grants 3,000 sqft of commercial space within the station, 1,000 sqft of advertising entitlement and provision for a future elevated connectivity bridge to Prestige Lakeshore Drive, a tech park project.

Jugjy Marwaha, CEO and executive director, Prestige Group (office), told **TOI**: "This is our way of giving back — by supporting and strengthening the city's mass transit system and urban infrastructure. Bellandur station is located in the heart of the ORR corridor, where nearly 80 million sqft of office space is concentrated. It is also strategically located close to our upcoming park, Prestige Lakeshore Drive. The idea is to ensure that Metro commuters can access our park and enjoy an experience comparable to global standards."

Marwaha added, "We are investing close to Rs 120 crore in total — around Rs 80 crore will go to the Metro, and Rs 40 crore will be allocated for station upgradation and enhancements."



Gold search: 16 in custody for mud theft at KGF

K Ranganath | TNN

More than 25 years after Bharat Gold Mines Limited shut down, illegal gold scavenging continues in Kolar Gold Fields. In two recent crackdowns, Oorgaum police arrested 16 people — many of them women — for entering restricted mining areas and stealing gold ore-mixed mud to extract small amounts of gold.

The first incident occurred on Feb 6, when security staffer Thyagaelu noticed eight men inside Griffert's shaft area. The group had allegedly cut through the protective fencing and was busy filling gunny bags with mud believed to contain traces of gold. Alerted by the guard, police rushed to the spot and arrested the accused. Four days later, on Feb 10, security guard Shankar spotted another gang of eight attempting a similar heist. They too were caught and taken to Oorgaum police station.

Police say the temptation is simple: even a few flecks of gold hidden in ore-mixed soil can fetch quick money. And so, under the cover of darkness, trespassers stealthily cut through fences and scoop up sacks of mud, hoping to chemically process it and extract traces of the precious metal.

The accused reportedly admitted that they extracted minute particles of gold and sold them to local jewellers. Police circle inspector Markondayya said during the peak of mining operations, one tonne of ore could yield three to four grams of gold. "Even today, people believe that small amounts of ore remain in discarded heaps and the same can be recovered through chemical extraction," he said. Advocate Velayudham of Robertsonpet said locals have long collected residual mud from drains near jewellery shops, hoping to recover milligrams of gold dust left behind during polishing and washing. With soaring gold prices, the temptation to extract even a gram has driven many to risk arrest.

Police said most of the accused are habitual offenders who repeatedly trespass despite warnings. The town's landscape, dotted with massive cyanide dump heaps, often fuels the illusion that gold still lies hidden beneath the soil. In fact, many have even lost their lives navigating the discarded mines. In May 2020, three men died of asphyxiation after entering a sealed mine shaft in search of scrap iron and leftover materials.

File photo

CHASING LUCK: The suspects were found near an abandoned shaft, a restricted part of the mine, digging up soil that contained traces of gold

Surplus solution: Agency may market compost from aptmts

Hamsaveni.N
@timesofindia.com

Bengaluru: As apartment complexes across Bengaluru struggle with mounting piles of surplus compost due to mandatory in-situ waste processing, the Karnataka Compost Development Corporation Limited (KCDCL) is exploring a plan to aggregate and market the manure collectively, offering a potential solution to the growing civic challenge.

Under SWM Rules-2026, bulk generators producing more than 100kg of waste daily must process wet waste on their premises. While the policy aims to reduce landfill burden, apartment associations say it has instead created a new issue — managing the compost generated. Most RWAs report that less than 10% of the manure is used for in-house gardening, while nearly half remains uncleared due to the absence of a structured marketplace.

The scale mismatch has worsened the situation. Farmers usually require compost in tonnes for transport to be viable, whereas individual apartment complexes produce smaller quantities, making direct sales difficult.

"The challenge is not producing compost, but managing what happens after that. There are not enough reliable buyers, and the ecosystem is not well-knit. Sometimes compost piles up due to delayed pickups, and we even pay transporters to clear it," said Shiva Prakash, former president of a 650-flat association.

A management committee member of a 600-plus flat complex on Mysuru Road echoed similar concerns, noting that nearly 600-700 kg of wet waste is processed daily but close to 50% of the compost remains unsold.

"Bulk waste generators are mandated to compost, but there is no system to support the exit pathway. Without a govt-backed platform linking demand and supply, the model becomes financially and logistically unsustainable," the member said. Amid these concerns, KCDCL has initiated discussions with the Bengaluru Apartment Federation to explore a coordinated solution. KCDCL chairman AN Nataraj Gowda said the corporation is working with the agriculture department to develop a system to collect surplus compost from clusters of apartments and market it through a centralised channel. Gowda acknowledged that the surplus compost problem has begun to discourage some apartment complexes from continuing strict segregation.

"We want apartments to continue composting so that wet waste does not go to landfills. To encourage them, we will not charge for collection. We are working on a structured solution and will soon come up with one," he added.

Photo for representation

Under SWM Rules-2026, bulk generators producing more than 100kg of waste every day must process wet waste on their premises

K-Rera now puts builders on notice over project updates

Defaulters Face ₹25,000 & 5% Of Project Cost In Penalties

Vindhya.Pabolu
@timesofindia.com

Bengaluru: In a further boost to homebuyer rights and also to encourage compliance with its rules, Karnataka Real Estate Regulatory Authority (K-Rera) has cracked the whip on 355 promoters in the state who have not filed their mandatory quarterly reports yet. The crackdown is seen as a tough warning to builders, who do not post timely updates on their projects and progress.

Promoters who have failed to obey the order face penalties of up to 5% of the total estimated project cost and Rs 25,000 for every quarter missed. However, the 355 builders have not been declared defaulters yet. "If they do not file returns by the end of the current financial year, then necessary action will be taken against them," a K-Rera officer said.

From April 1, K-Rera will initiate recovery proceedings for delayed or non-submitted quarterly updates. The authority has given time till March 31 for promoters — including petitioners in relevant writ petitions — to submit pending updates without penalty. n Feb 7 this year, K-Rera issued a circular imposing fines and timelines for submission of quarterly updates by promoters who delayed or skipped mandatory quarterly project updates between 2017-18 and 2024-25. This follows up on an earlier circular dated Sept 3, 2020, and an order of Karnataka high court dated Sept 19, 2025.

Several promoters challenged the 2020 circular before Karnataka high court, which quashed the order. The court, however, clarified that this would not prevent the imposition of fees in a manner recognised by law. Builders agreed that quarterly filings are largely procedural and technical and said penalties — justified, though — should be "acceptable, nominal and proportionate".

A senior K-Rera official explained the importance of filing timely quarterly reports as the exercise helps the authority to track project progress. "In case of any delays, we can identify such projects early. If homebuyers do file a complaint, then we can take action against the promoter," he said.

While welcoming K-Rera's move, homebuyers expressed mixed views on its likely effectiveness. They said the measure enables authorities to take suo motu action if timelines are not met. However, many felt the penalty was too low to make a substantive impact. Despite earlier circulars, quarterly project updates are often not properly monitored, and the lack of a clear project completion policy raises questions about accountability.

Photo for representation only

PENALTY CORNER

- Period from Q2 2017-18 to Q2 2018-19 treated as one quarter since the web portal was available only from Q2 2018-19. Promoters to pay penalty of Rs 25,000 a quarter, totalling Rs 25,000
- For Q3 and Q4 of 2018-19, quarterly penalty of Rs 25,000 kicks in, totalling Rs 50,000
- For each of the financial years (2019-20, 2020-21, 2021-22, 2022-23, 2023-24, and 2024-25), quarterly penalty is Rs 25,000, amounting to Rs 1 lakh a year
- As per 2020 order, Rs 10,000 penalty for delay of one month after the due date; after one month, delay penalty doubles to Rs 20,000

PAYMENT CALENDAR

Promoters must submit quarterly project updates through K-Rera portal

QUARTERS	DEADLINE
Q1	July 15
Q2	Oct 15
Q3	Jan 15
Q4	April 15

Man in soup for creating fake clip on ex-Muda chief

Bengaluru: CCB sleuths Saturday arrested a Mysuru-based man on charges of creating a fake audio clip of conversation between former Muda commissioner BA Natesh and others.

In the audio, Natesh is heard claiming to have paid a Rs 1.6 crore bribe for his promotion. The accused is Vinod Narayan Lal, in his 30s.

Police also detained Mysuru activist Snehamayi Krishna as he posted the audio on social media, and it went viral. TNN

Health dept may get recruitment board

▸Continued from page 1

Health minister **Dinesh Gundu Rao** said a proposal had been submitted to constitute a separate recruitment board for the health department, citing its size and scope. The minister said the govt is considering appointing 700 students with a monthly stipend of Rs 8,000, calling it a first-of-its-kind initiative. Within two months, 220 specialists will be appointed to strengthen super-specialty services in govt hospitals, he said.

Gundu Rao said around 1,400 MBBS doctors are currently serving under compulsory rural service and a proposal is under consideration to extend the requirement to postgraduate students.

Rise above caste and religion: Siddaramaiah

Welcoming 1,000 recruits into the health department, chief minister Siddaramaiah reminded them that every cadre is as important as doctors in delivering healthcare services.

"You did not take up this job merely for money or livelihood. This department saves lives and prevents diseases. You must work with humanitarian values," the CM said.

"There is no caste or religion for disease — it affects everyone. When a patient needs blood, no one asks about caste or religion. It is only after recovery that society begins to differentiate. Leave caste and religion at home and work on humanitarian grounds. Treat patients with love, care and compassion," Siddaramaiah told the recruits.

No info on CM statement, social media post on corruption: DKS

▸Continued from page 1

Asked about CM's statement and social media post on rising corruption in state, **DK Shivakumar** said he had no information on that.

On Bagalkot violence, he said he returned to Bengaluru from Assam late Friday after marathon meetings and was exhausted. "I have no information. I will gather details," he said. He is one of the senior central observers of Congress for the forthcoming Assam assembly polls. Responding to a query on whether a Congress delegation would visit the affected area in Bagalkot and if compensation would be paid, he said a decision would be taken once officials submit their report.

Senior MLA rejects chief minister's conspiracy claim

Senior Congress MLA HC Balakrishna Saturday dismissed Siddaramaiah's claim of a "political conspiracy" and rejected suggestions of jealousy within the party amid the leadership tussle. "There is no need to be jealous of Siddaramaiah. Congress has given him all kinds of opportunities," he said, adding that senior party functionaries had supported Siddaramaiah and that leadership decisions rest with the high command.

Siddaramaiah earlier said he would fight "the politics of hatred and jealousy", alleging repeated attempts to finish him politically.

MLA's PAs threw ₹1L into school compound during bribe raid: Officials

▸Continued from page 1

Officials said Lamani's govt PA Manjunath Walmiki and private PA Guru Lamani threw Rs 1 lakh into a neighbouring private school compound in an attempt to destroy evidence. Lokayukta police seized Rs 4.5 lakh cash at Balaji Hospital and Rs 5 lakh from the private school compound.

Dr Lamani, a medical practitioner, was taluk health officer in Laxmeshwar. He resigned from service to contest the 2023 assembly elections as a BJP candidate and won from Shirahatti segment. Reacting to the incident, in a sarcastic remark, deputy chief minister DK Shivakumar said, "BJP leaders are very honest. They are corruption-free in this country. The Lokayukta might have received some wrong information."

The development is seen as a setback to the principal opposition BJP, which has been targeting Congress govt over allegations of corruption, commissions from contractors and delays in releasing payments.

Opposition leader in the legislative council Chalavadi Narayanaswamy said he is yet to get the details but asserted that the party does not tolerate bribery.

DCM seeks 100 acres near Bengaluru for new landfill

Times News Network

Bengaluru: Facing mounting pressure over waste management, deputy chief minister DK Shivakumar has appealed to farmers, landowners and developers to offer at least 100 acres of land within a 40-km radius of Bengaluru, adjacent to a hillock, for the establishment of a new landfill facility.

"We are willing to purchase the land outright and pay in cash. No TDR will be offered," Shivakumar said, adding that compensation will be provided in accordance with the 2013 Land Acquisition Act.

He suggested land parcels along Kolar, Nelamangala, Kanakapura, Magadi and Tumakuru Road — especially near hilly and forested areas — as these locations may have a relatively lower environmental impact.

He assured that, with the consent of landowners, the govt would develop approach roads suitable for tractors and compactors. "Both farmers and developers can offer land. Those interested can approach GBA, which will process the proposals. A GBA meeting will be convened soon," he added.

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OBITUARY

DEATH ANNOUNCEMENTS

DEATH ANNIVERSARY

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

Mrs RUSY SOANS

28.06.1956 - 20.02.2026

With profound grief we inform the sad demise of Mrs. Rusy Soans, W/o Mr. Godfrey Pradeep Soans. Funeral service will be held in St. Andrew's Church at 2 pm on Sunday, 22nd February 2026. Burial at Gate No.1, Indian Christian Cemetery, Hosur Road, Bengaluru.

Deeply mourned by Pradeep Soans, Prashanth and Delphine, Sangeetha

TENTH YEAR REMEMBRANCE

Mrs. Mary Mathew Muthalaly (Baby)

1920 - 2016

She left footprints of love that no storm can erase, her warmth remains in every embrace.

Mathew Family
Coconut Grove, E-city - Bangalore

Shraddhanjali

With great sadness we announce the demise of **Mr. K.N. Ramaswami**, 93 years, on Feb 21, 2026. Survived by wife, children, grandchildren, great grandchild, brother, nieces, nephews and a large extended family and friends who were all dear to him.

17th Year Remembrance

B. P. PAPANNA REDDY

Vaikuntam: 22.02.2009

Your memories will never be forgotten or erased from the minds of your dearest ones, you will always remain in our hearts!

Inserted by
Smt. Jayalakshmamma & Family

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A LEGACY OF
INSPIRATION

IN REMEMBRANCE OF
Shri. P N PANDURANGA RAO
(Eldest Son of Late Shri. P N Rao)
22.02.1925 - 23.10.1995

He was a visionary whose passion shaped P N RAO into a symbol of timeless craftsmanship.

His spirit inspires every stitch, detail, and milestone we achieve.

As we honor his birth centenary, we celebrate his legacy and reaffirm our commitment to his ideals.

Management, Staff & Family Members
P N RAO
FINE SUITS
SINCE 1923

SAD DEMISE

Reginald D'Souza

Dob : 6th Dec 1945
Dod : 19th Feb 2026
Funeral service on 23/02/2026 @ 11am at FGAG Church, Indiranagar. Burial at Hosur Road Cemetery.

Deeply mourned by
Wife, Children & Grandchildren

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CM: With AI emerging, fill up only required vacancies

Asks VCs If Guest Lecturers Are Not Part Of Workforce

Bengaluru: Questioning universities over repeated claims of staff shortages, chief minister Siddaramaiah Saturday asked their vice-chancellors whether guest lecturers could not be considered part of the academic workforce.

"When universities are asked to rectify issues, they often cite lack of staff. Are your guest lecturers not staff? How many permanent faculty members are there in the world's best universities? Visiting professors enhance the academic environment there. Why is this not possible here?" the CM said during an interaction with vice-chancellors at the Karnataka State Higher Education Council.

He acknowledged that irregular recruitment over the past two decades led to a severe shortage of teachers in the higher education sector. The govt was aware that 60-70% of teaching positions were vacant in major state universities, he said. Clarifying that the govt was not blocking recruitment, Siddaramaiah pointed out that last year's budget permitted the filling of 2,000 posts in colleges. "This year, we will allow recruitment in universities as well," he added.

SIDDARAMAIAH'S PROMISES

- Karnataka higher education transformation plan of ₹2,500 crore with support of Asian Development Bank
- Transforming Mysuru into 'global education and innovation hub' and 'national knowledge district' by 2030
- Edutech and life sciences research park to be constructed on 100 acres, attracting investment of around ₹15,000 crore and creating over 50,000 skilled jobs
- Plan to adopt around 100 engineering colleges in collaboration with industries under way
- Karnataka State Skill Development Policy 2025-32

> Recently, Galgotias University in Uttar Pradesh claimed to have prepared an AI robot dog which had been made by China, bringing India's reputation down at a global level. This tarnished the dignity of India's higher education institutions. In recent years, instead of fostering scientific and rational thinking in universities, we are conducting research on speculative past events
>
> **Siddaramaiah** | CHIEF MINISTER

However, the CM stressed the need for rationalisation in the era of AI. "With AI emerging worldwide, there is a necessity to fill only the required courses. Who benefits from running courses that are not essential to society and filling them with teachers?" he said, suggesting that universities must align academic programmes with contemporary needs.

Recalling the past glory of state universities, he noted that institutions in Mysuru, Dharwad, Bengaluru, and Kalaburagi once produced distinguished scholars despite limited resources.

"These universities were renowned on the global map of scholarship. We studied in such systems. But why is it not possible to build excellent universities now?" the chief minister said.

The VCs' conclave discussed 38 key issues related to the administration and academic systems of universities, including financial discipline, retirement pension issues, uniformity in convocations, shortages of teaching and non-teaching staff, and the use of CSR funds.

The CM said that while the State Education Policy committee's interim recommendations from 2024-25 academic year were implemented, instructions were given that the remaining recommendations should be implemented immediately.

Caste enclaves: CM

The CM noted that the universities were becoming caste enclaves. "They must transcend caste and religion, and cultivate scientific and rational thinking. They must work to liberate the youth from this mindset. Plans must be prepared for what needs to be done for this," he said and asked universities to ensure curriculum is aligned with global standards.

Karnataka has 94 universities, including 32 public ones, with a total of 2.7 million students.

Governor Thawar Chand Gehlot drew the CM's attention to the need for increased financial support for the state's universities in this year's budget, particularly emphasising the necessity for more aid to music, folk, Sanskrit and Kannada universities.

Groom hurt in car crash, bride flees to B'luru

Haveri: A car carrying a groom and his friends skidded and overturned near Chennahalli village in Hirekerur taluk of Haveri district while the couple was on their way to get married, injuring 3 people and leading to the bride fleeing the scene.

The injured were identified as Irfan, Chandrakant and Gururaj. They were admitted to hospital for treatment. The bride escaped to Bengaluru, while the groom and his friends received medical care at the hospital. The young woman from Hirekerur taluk, who worked in Bengaluru, and Irfan were in love. They planned to marry secretly without their parents' knowledge, police said.

A few days ago, the young woman came to her village on the pretext of attending a fair. Irfan, along with his friends Gururaj and Chandrakant, came to Hirekerur taluk to elope with the bride and get married. They decided to take her to Bengaluru in the car, fearing that her parents might come looking for her. The vehicle overturned near Chennahalli Tanda and was damaged.

As the car overturned near the village, locals gathered to help the young men. Taking advantage of the situation, the bride discreetly managed to hitch a ride from someone and boarded a bus to Bengaluru. TNN

Hampi horror: Judge details 'calculated brutality' at scene

Chansaraj Savadi | TNN

Koppal: Chilling details have now emerged in public domain on the Sunapur rape-murder case, with the judgment delivered by the First Additional District and Sessions Court in Gangavathi on Feb 16 now available online.

The court had handed out death penalty to three men convicted of the crime in which an Israeli woman tourist, aged 27, along with an Indian homestay owner, 29, were gang raped, and Bibhas Nayak, 26, an Indian tourist guide from Odisha, was murdered. Two other tourists — Daniel Pitas, 28, from the US, and Punkaj Pattil, 43, from Nashik in Maharashtra — were physically assaulted.

All five met at a homestay near the Unesco World Heritage Site of Hampi and had gone out stargazing near the Tungabhadra Left bank Canal on March 6 last year when the incident occurred.

The court had held that the case fell in the category of "rarest of rare" crimes due to its calculated brutality and coordinated execution.

The convicts — Mallesh alias Handimalla, 22; Sai alias Chaitanya Sai, 21; and Sharanappa alias Sharanabasavaraj, 30; all residents of Sainagar in Gangavathi — were found guilty of rape, murder, attempted murder, and robbery.

PARTNERS IN CRIME: (Clockwise from top left) Mallesh, Chetan Sainam & Sharanappa

Pronouncing the verdict, presiding Judge Sadananda Nagappa Nayak meticulously reconstructed the sequence of events, observing that the accused had approached the tourists with the clear intention of robbery and sexual assault. When the victims resisted, they were brutally attacked.

According to the findings recorded during trial, Bibhas had attempted to shield the two women and fend off the attackers. The court noted that he was chased towards a canal, pushed into the water and relentlessly pelted with stones, leading to his death.

The court termed the act intentional and calculated, stating that the assault aimed to eliminate resistance.

The other two male companions were also attacked with stones and they too, sustained serious head injuries. The judge observed that this was done to incapacitate them, so that the sexual offences on the two women could be carried out without interference.

On the charge of rape, the court held that the two women were overpowered and sexually assaulted by the offenders acting in concert. The judgment underscored that the crime was not an individual act, but a coordinated assault executed with shared intent. Each offender, the court said, was fully aware of and complicit in the actions of the others.

Describing the conduct of the convicts as reflecting "total depravity" and a complete disregard for human dignity, the court noted that the offences formed a continuous chain of criminal acts — sexual violence, murder, attempted murder and robbery — carried out in a single, coordinated episode. The assailants had also robbed the victims, stealing two mobile phones and Rs 9,500 in cash before fleeing the crime scene.

The court identified several aggravating factors: the exceptional brutality of the killing, vulnerability of the victims, multiplicity of offences and the absence of mitigating circumstances.

The manner of the murder — pushing the victim into deep water and stoning him while he struggled to get out — was described as particularly heinous. The court concluded that the case met the legal threshold for invoking the "rarest of rare" doctrine.

Undertrial not produced before court for four years; HC demands report

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bengaluru: The high court pulled up the prisons department for failing to produce an undertrial before the court concerned for the last four years, and directed the DIG (prisons) to submit a report on action taken in such instances of non-production of undertrials.

"Put your prison in order. Should this court pass an order to produce an undertrial before the court concerned? Highly incorrect. Accused are also human beings unless convicted," Justice M Nagaprasanna orally observed while seeking details on the issue.

In the case at hand, the petitioner Imran alias Kulla was in prison for the past four years. His advocate submitted that he could not be released from jail despite being granted bail for not being able to arrange the surety.

It was further submitted that a head constable attached to HAL police reported to the court stating that an NBW (non-bailable warrant) issued against the petitioner could not be executed as the accused was not found, while he was in prison in a criminal case registered by HAL police.

The advocate also stated that for the last four years, not even once was the accused brought before the court, even through video conferencing, and on that score multiple adjournments were granted for appearance by the concerned court.

The court directed DIG (prisons) to submit a report on the issue of production of undertrials. "DIG should state before this court that appropriate steps will be taken to identify all those persons who have not been produced before court in the next two weeks," it said.

HDK: EV market saw 60% annual growth in 6 years

Bengaluru: Union minister **HD Kumaraswamy** Saturday said India's electric vehicle (EV) market has grown at over 60% annually in the past six years, with registrations nearing 2 million units in financial year 2024-25.

Addressing an EV expo here, he said two-wheelers continue to drive mass adoption, while electric passenger vehicles, buses and commercial fleets are expanding steadily. He added that India's Net Zero 2070 target is being backed by Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat initiatives. He highlighted the impact of Rs 11,500-crore FAME-II scheme, which has supported over 16.7 lakh EVs.

The minister said Karnataka, particularly Bengaluru, is well placed to emerge as a global hub for electric mobility innovation and manufacturing. TNN

Resort organised programme without permission: Koppal SP

▶ Continued from page 1

What particularly shocked the police and the district administration was that the bash was organised on a riverbank, disregarding environmental and regulatory concerns.

RIVERBANK BASH

In the Hampi rape-murder case, the Additional District and Sessions Court in Gangavathi had handed out death penalty to three convicts.

The shocking riverbank party venue fell within the notified limits of Tungabhadra Otter Conservation Reserve, India's first such reserve, established in 2016. The 34-km protected stretch, along with Tungabhadra river, spans ecologically sensitive zones and includes the Hampi world heritage site.

A senior forest official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the area is a protected zone. "Holding a party there with loud music and liquor is in violation of regulations," the official said.

Koppal SP Ram L Arasiddi confirmed that the resort had not obtained approval for the programme. "The resort owners organised the event in an open area without permission and violated norms. A case was registered and notices were issued. We are also investigating who all attended the event," he said.

Munirabad police added that an inquiry is under way to assess the full extent of violations and determine whether additional provisions under forest and environmental laws could be pressed.

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STATISTICS A slice of life in numbers

Who judges the judges? A look at complaints against judiciary

In a question in Lok Sabha on complaints of "corruption, sexual misconduct or other serious impropriety" against HC and SC judges, govt said these are examined through an internal mechanism

Pocso court orders FIR against seer, disciple

Rajesh Kumar Pandey | TNN

Prayagraj: A Pocso court ordered police to register a criminal case against Swami Avimukteshwaranand and his disciple Swami Muktanand Giri over alleged sexual exploitation of minor boys at a camp run by the seer during Magh Mela in Prayagraj.

Judge Vinod Kumar Chaurasia directed police to lodge an FIR and investigation. Saturday's order came on a petition filed by Shankuri Peethadheshwar Ashutosh Maharaj, a plaintiff in the Krishna Janmabhoomi-Shahi Eidgah title dispute.

Ashutosh Maharaj alleged that during Magh Mela, two minor boys approached him at his camp and accused Avimukteshwaranand of sexually exploiting them. He said he approached Prayagraj police seeking registration of an FIR, but received no response.

The petitioner then moved the Pocso court, seeking directions for police action. During proceedings, the court sought and received a response from Avimukteshwaranand. Statements of the complainant and the two minors were recorded in court.

After hearing all sides, the court reserved its order on Feb 14 and pronounced it on Feb 21. Judge Kumar said the allegations disclose serious and specific sexual assault, which prima facie constitute cognisable offences punishable under Pocso Act and BNS.

India & Brazil sign rare earths pact

Set Bilateral Trade Target Of $30bn By 2030

Sachin Parashar
@timesofindia.com

New Delhi: An agreement for cooperation on rare earths and critical minerals, bilateral trade target of $30 billion by 2030 and Global South solidarity in technology that, according to PM Narendra Modi, must be inclusive and act as a bridge for shared progress were among the highlights of Modi's bilateral meeting with Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva on Saturday.

PM Modi meets Brazilian President Lula in New Delhi on Saturday

Modi said that the critical minerals agreement, which could potentially lower dependence on China, was a major step towards building resilient supply chains. Significantly, the leaders discussed the US Supreme Court judgment striking down President Donald Trump's global tariffs and agreed that both sides needed to study its implications. "So, we will essentially be in a wait-and-watch mode to see how the administration responds to this judgment, whether any further steps are taken and to study the implications for our trade," said MEA secretary P Kumaran at a media briefing.

Lula mentioned trade unilateralism in his remarks and also said that in a turbulent world, both sides were required to strengthen and deepen their strategic dialogue. "India and Brazil are crucial voices at the UN, at the WTO and G20," said the president, while also underlining the significance of cooperation under BRICS.

Modi and Lula focused on energy transition, and defence and security cooperation that the PM said was a perfect example of mutual trust and strategic harmony. "We will continue to strengthen this win-win partnership further," said Modi in his media remarks. In all, India and Brazil signed nine agreements, including one in the field of mining for steel supply chain, and also announced that Brazil will extend business visas for ordinary Indian passport holders to 10 years.

Modi said that the expansion of India's trade agreement with Mercosur (a South American trading bloc) will further strengthen economic cooperation and that bilateral cooperation in the field of technology and innovation is important for both countries as well as the Global South. "We are also prioritising our cooperation in areas such as Artificial Intelligence, supercomputers, semiconductors and blockchain," he said, adding that energy cooperation too has been a strong pillar of the relationship and there's now increasing cooperation in renewable energy, ethanol blending and sustainable aviation fuel.

"As democratic countries, we will continue to advance the priorities and aspirations of the Global South. When India and Brazil work together, the voice of the Global South becomes stronger and more confident," said the PM.

Artery forceps left inside patient: Ex-HoD booked in Kerala

Kottayam: Ambalapuzha police on Saturday filed a case against Dr Lalithambika Karunakaran, former head of gynaecology department of Alappuzha Medical College, in connection with a case in which a pair of artery forceps was left inside a patient's abdomen during surgery nearly five years ago. Interestingly, those who were part of the surgery team, including Dr Shahida and nurse P S Dhanya, were not named as accused. TNN

Livspace cuts 1,000 jobs; co-founder Saurabh Jain exits

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bengaluru: Home interior platform Livspace has laid off around 12% of its workforce — approximately 1,000 employees — over the past six months as the company reorganises itself into what it describes as an "AI-native, agentic organisation."

The company said the move was part of a phased transition rather than a single event. In a statement, a spokesperson clarified that Livspace has integrated "advanced AI agents and automation" across core functions, including sales, operations, design, and marketing, with several manual tasks now handled by intelligent systems.

"To be clear, this isn't reactive cost-cutting. It's a strategic reallocation of resources. We are investing heavily in AI and technology that enables better customer outcomes with greater precision. We are choosing to lean into the future of work rather than cling to legacy operational models," the spokesperson said.

According to the company, AI-driven mood boarding and 3D rendering tools within the design function have reduced the time from concept to visualisation by 60%. In sales, AI-led voice agents, lead scoring, and automated nurturing tools now manage the initial stages of the funnel, allowing human sales teams to focus on high-intent consultations. In operations, Livspace said supply chain management and project tracking are now governed by predictive AI systems, reducing the need for manual monitoring of delivery timelines. In marketing, the company has shifted to what it calls a "Creative Factory" model, moving from manual ad creation to automated content generation, increasing output tenfold. Livspace said the realignment was carried out gradually over six months as AI systems were tested and deployed. The phased rollout, it added, ensured service standards were maintained even as manual roles were reduced.

The restructuring coincides with a leadership transition. Co-founder Saurabh Jain, who has been with the company for 11 years, has decided to move on to pursue personal interests. The company described his departure as a "natural transition in our leadership," noting that he exits at a "moment of profound transformation" for the business.

Agartala-Dhaka bus likely to resume soon

Biswendu Bhattacharjee | TNN

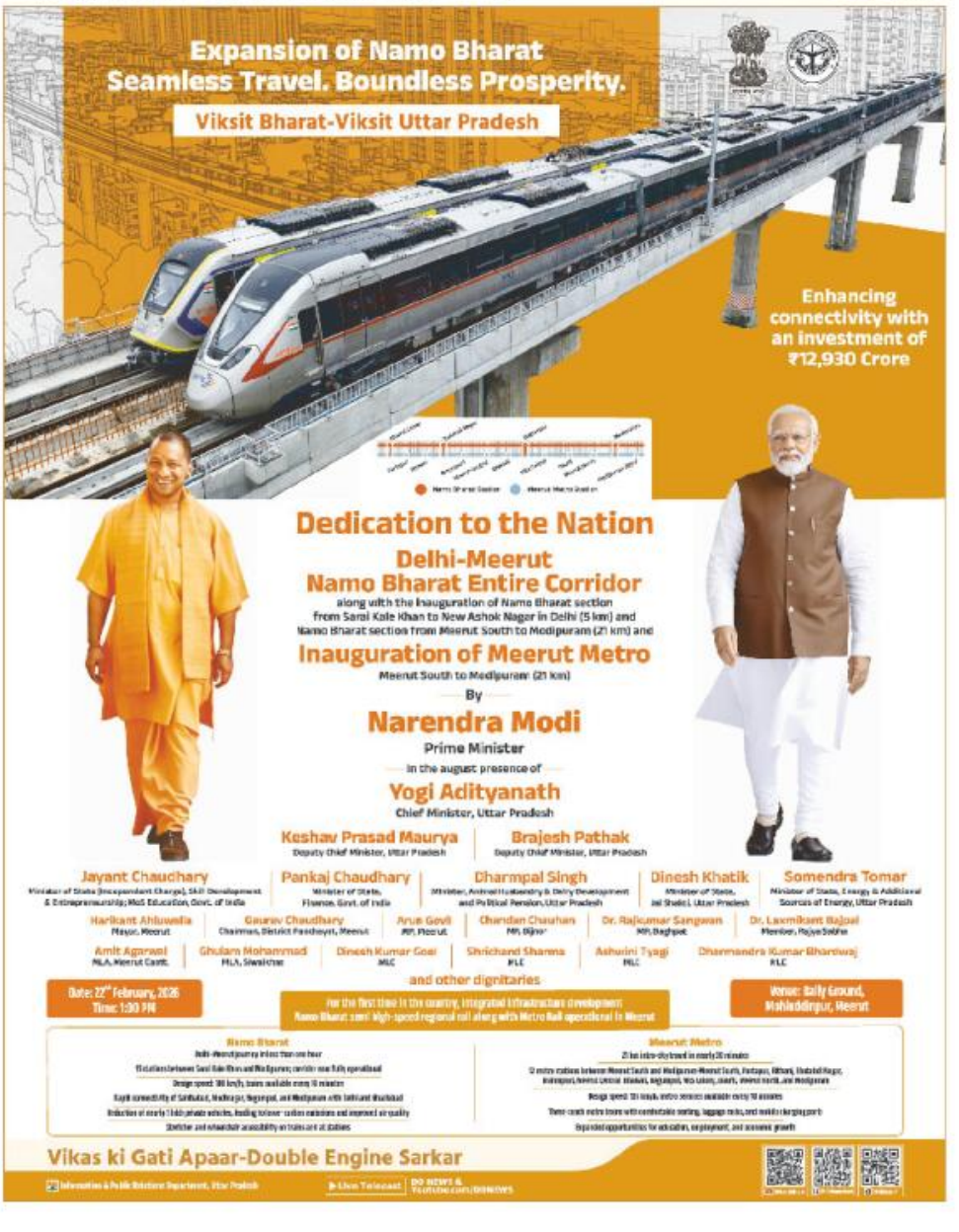
Agartala: Three days after Tarique Rahman assumed office as the Bangladesh PM, trial runs of the Agartala-Dhaka direct bus service have started, signalling possible resumption of commercial operations suspended for more than a year amid a halt in visa services and strained bilateral relations.

A luxury bus covering a distance of 156km from Dhaka arrived in Agartala through the Akhaura Integrated Check Post on Friday and returned to the Bangladesh capital on Saturday, completing the cross-border trial run.

"I welcome the move. The uncertainty is over with the formation of an elected govt in Bangladesh. This is a good sign in bilateral ties. We hope other issues will also be addressed," Tripura CM Manik Saha said. Officials said the trials followed directives from the new Bangladeshi administration and added that, if preparations proceed as planned, the service could resume shortly.

The service was halted in Aug 2024 following strained bilateral relations after the ouster of former Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina. The cross-border bus service between the two cities was launched in 2015. It was briefly interrupted during the Covid pandemic and resumed in June 2022.

With a new govt in Dhaka and the domestic situation stabilising, authorities have moved to revive the route that links Tripura to Kolkata via Dhaka and facilitates travel between India's northeastern region and eastern states through Bangladesh.



70-yr-old woman loses ₹3cr in 60 days of digital arrest

Times News Network

Dehradun: A 70-year-old woman was allegedly put under digital arrest for 60 days and duped of Rs 3 crore by cyber criminals who claimed to be officers from Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probing a money laundering case in Dehradun.

According to police, the incident took place between Sept 1 and Oct 30 last year, and came to light after the septuagenarian filed a complaint at the state cyber-crime unit on Friday. An FIR was subsequently registered under sections of BNS and the IT Act.

A man first contacted the senior citizen on WhatsApp on Sept 1, a police officer, investigating the matter, said, adding that he claimed to be a CBI officer and told her that her phone number had been found in a money laundering case estimated to be around Rs 68cr.

The officer further said that the accused then sent her fake documents of CBI and the RBI pertaining to the "case" in which her name was mentioned. Hearing the claims, the woman became worried and agreed to comply, the officer added.

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"The accused told her that she would be put under digital arrest till the 'investigation' of all her investments and bank accounts is complete. Out of fear, she shared her confidential banking and finance related details before ending up transferring a total sum of Rs 3cr to the bank accounts mentioned by the perpetrators. After receiving the amount, the scamsters stopped all contact with her. Eventually, she realised that she was a victim of cyber fraud," said the officer.

SSP of STF and state cyber cell, Ajai Singh, said, "We have registered a case of cheating and impersonating others and initiated a probe to nab the accused at the earliest. We also want to appeal to people to not fall prey to any such calls."

Fresh twist in Rahman song row

Sureshkumar.K
@timesofindia.com

Chennai: A day after reports suggested that **AR Rahman** had informed Supreme Court of his willingness to credit the late Ustad M Faiyazuddin Dagar and his nephew for the song Veera Raja Veera in the 2023 film Ponniyin Selvan II, the music director's lawyer issued a clarification on Saturday.

"The claims of authorship by the Junior Dagar Brothers over the composition of Shiva Stuti and the allegations of copyright infringement are categorically denied and disputed," advocate Narmadha Sampath said in a statement.

Shiva Stuti is a landmark rendition composed by renowned classical singers Junior Dagar brothers. According to Sampath, "these positions, as upheld by the division bench of Delhi high court, remain fully intact and unaffected by the clarification to the credits given before the apex court".

SC disposed of a plea by Ustad Faiyaz Wasifuddin Dagar challenging the HC order and did not express any view on the merits of the dispute, Sampath said.

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‘Gender bias is a huge danger in AI — we must halt tech from being by and for men’

*Economist **Lina Galvez Munoz** is a Member of the European Parliament. In Delhi, Munoz spoke with **Srijana Mitra Das** at **Times Evoke** about technology and women's rights, regulating the digital world and gender equality in Europe, the US — and India:*

FOREFRONT THE FEMALE GAZE: Munoz, here with the 'Biodiversity: It's In My Nature' mural made by students for the 'EU Goes to School' project, emphasises women shaping the digital world

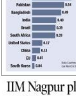
What is the purpose of your visit?

■ I am visiting India with the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality of the European Parliament. We advance gender equality policies within the European Union (EU) and work on the EU's Gender Action Plan for external programs. This applies when the EU works with other countries via cooperation programs, trade agreements, etc. We also seek to learn about gender from other countries. India is a wonderful place — it is culturally rich and diverse, which is similar to the EU. India is leading in areas like science and technology and it is a prominent head of the Global South. So, we're here to explore how to work together in tackling gender inequality, violence against women and the lack of opportunities for girls.

Speaking of technology, globally, we see greater male access to internet, mobiles, etc. — how do you see this gender imbalance play out with AI?

■ This is possibly one of the most dangerous aspects of AI we must deal with now — unless we correct how this is developing, the impacts will be very damaging for gender equality. A technology is not good or bad in itself — it depends on how it is designed and used. AI is basically data and algorithms — the data here is already biased because programmers doing this work see reality mostly from a male gaze. Our existing AI framework has been mainly constructed by men — women are treated as 'the other'. It's worrying because an entirely new framework is being built through digitisation — and this draws from biased data and algorithms mainly designed by men, further increasing gender biases embedded in AI.

Women already have less access to the digital world — we now risk the future of these fields becoming mainly by and for men. We must correct this while we can, making AI inclusive and getting more women to design this new world. This cannot be left largely to affluent white men sitting in California.



TIMES EVOKE DIPLOMATICUS

Does the EU have specific steps in mind for this?

■ We have legislation and we're putting more policies on the table. The EU's Artificial Intelligence Act is a broad first step — it outlines how the development of AI should be human-centric and must respect human rights and inclusion. We also have the EU's Digital Services Act that basically says whatever is illegal offline should be illegal online — if you put up deepfakes, for instance, which commodify women and do not have consent, this must be punished. A platform should be held accountable for what happens on it — this is like the environmental commons, in a way, where you have tech platforms using a commons but for private gain and without public benefit or accountability. That must be addressed.

We are also working to improve the participation of women in STEM (science, tech, engineering and math) — currently, while we are doing quite well in women's education here, this does not reflect in women working later on in STEM. Social stereotypes hold many back. Our societies still emphasise hyper-beautification for girls, pushing them towards being 'nice' and 'attractive' rather than entering science and technology. Similarly, we socialise boys into being 'masculine' rather than emphasising their participation in care work, which is left mostly to women and highly undervalued.

Importantly, a huge amount of money in the digital world now promotes toxic masculinity — this explains why so many countries are seeing the rise of such machismo and political movements which explicitly reject demands for gender equality and deny the reality of gender-based violence. This is not happening out of the blue — this is coming also from a new extreme right coalition which invests billions of dollars via social media into such damaging mindsets. Social media's business model — cultivating hateful material simply in order to have longer engagement — is certainly harming women more.

❝ Money is being poured into the digital world to promote toxic masculinity — and reject gender equality

How does Europe as a whole compare in terms of gender equality to America today?

■ There are some countries in Europe now which have a 'strongman' in power and engage in the politics of toxic masculinity. In America, we are seeing disturbing measures towards stopping the financing of gender studies and feminist knowledge — vested interests are trying to destroy crucial advances that were made. Social rights are in danger in many states. But Europe, with all its differences, is still resisting — European women are advancing economically and in spheres of knowledge. We need many more on the digital building side. Our work on reproductive agency for women navigates diverse member states — we are seeing pushbacks in some, so we have to be alert. I hope the United States, with its extremely strong knowledge communities and civil society, will fight off tendencies to deny women's equality.

What are your views on gender equality in India?

■ What gives me great hope is that India's government and Parliament are really trying to advance women's empowerment. Several key legislations have been passed. India also has a very strong civil society — its people are pushing authorities to mainstream gender. Some social norms are still deeply unequal for boys and girls. This is not easy to change. There is consequently a gap between development policies and their implementation. The EU and India should work together on closing this gap.

Can the recently-signed India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) emphasise gender equality?

■ Gender is certainly included within the FTA. There is also a need for data collection. We require this to know social reality — and transform it. We recognise there are challenges due to poverty and differences in cultural approaches to gender in India, alongside growing digital violence against women. However, the FTA does offer us common ground by increasing women's participation in trade, the digital world, etc. and we can use this now to work through government, media, educationists and civil society groups to empower women.

(Views expressed are personal)
Times Evoke 'Diplomaticus' is an occasional series with international envoys on environment, society & geopolitics

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Goyal: Working to expand pact with S American bloc

Times News Network

New Delhi: India and Brazil are working to expand the preferential trade agreement with Mercosur, the South American bloc, as both nations seek to significantly step up trade and investment.

"The Mercosur region is particularly important for us, and we are working to expand our India-Mercosur preferential trade agreement, to improve market access, to grow investments on both sides, to have technology partnerships, and to engage in sports, education, culture," commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal said at India-Brazil Business Forum, organised by Ficci.

Mercosur, which includes Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay, and India have a preferential trade agreement for 15 years, but the coverage is limited to 450 products. Both sides are working to convert it into a free trade agreement for which the scope is being finalised.

Describing current bilateral trade with Brazil, estimated at $15 billion last year, as sub-optimal, Goyal called for a need to step up the ambition.

"When we think of Brazil, we think of its rich natural resources, minerals like niobium, lithium and iron ore are vital for shaping the future of technology and global energy transition," he said, adding that India and Brazil could reshape global value chains.

India and Brazil on Saturday set an annual bilateral trade target of $20 billion over the next five years.

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said there is huge potential to boost bilateral trade, which can be scaled up to $30 billion. "That is a lot of growth, but still not much if we take into consideration Brazil's and India's size," he said, adding both countries are now looking beyond powerhouses like Europe, US, Japan and China.

Lula said that Brazil, which has 26% of world's reserves of critical minerals, wants to attract companies to process them, and an agreement signed with India was a step in that direction.

President Lula with Piyush Goyal at the India-Brazil Business Forum Saturday

Adani, Embraer deepen India assembly plan

The Adani Group and Embraer have deepened their resolve to set up a final assembly line (FAL) in India. Taking the next step from an initial pact last month, Adani Defence & Aerospace and Embraer Saturday exchanged an "enhanced" MoU for an E175 FAL in the presence of Brazil president Lula and commerce minister Piyush Goyal. The MoU was exchanged between Adani Defence & Aerospace director Jeet Adani and Embraer president and CEO Francisco Gomes Neto.

The 76-88 seater E175 regional jet is used for short- to medium-haul flights. Embraer said the Jan 2026 MoU marks a step towards developing an integrated regional transport aircraft ecosystem, covering manufacturing, supply chain, aftermarket services, pilot training and securing orders. India requires 500 aircraft in 80-146 seat segment over 20 years, reflecting demand for efficient regional connectivity. TNN

"We want to invest and consolidate our presence in India with the transfer of technology and personnel capacity building. With the agreement signed by Embraer with Adani and Mahindra groups, these agreements are going to allow for production of commercial and defence aircraft in India," he said.

IIM Nagpur plans to use AI to set question papers, check answers

Shishir.Arya@timesofindia.com

Nagpur: The message is balance — machines for speed, humans for judgement. IIM Nagpur plans to deploy artificial intelligence to speed up evaluation of answer sheets and project work, cutting turnaround time from weeks to days while keeping teachers in charge of final grading.

AI systems would scan for key concepts mapped to answer codes to generate scores

Director Bhimaraya Metri said Saturday that the institute was exploring AI tools for assessment and question-paper setting, with difficulty levels calibrated through prompts.

Manual checking that now takes about two weeks could be completed in a day or two after AI-assisted first reads, he said.

"AI cannot replace humans, but it cannot be ignored," Metri said, adding the push was to use technology without diluting the innovative thinking that was expected of future entrepreneurs.

Under the plan, exams would shift online to enable machine evaluation. AI systems would scan for key concepts mapped to answer codes to generate preliminary scores. Human examiners would then review scripts to catch gaps or reward responses that exceeded model answers. "An initial assessment by AI would certainly make the whole process much faster," Metri said.

IIM Nagpur is also considering licences for select AI platforms and expects a decision soon after internal consultations.

Access to AI tools would be extended to students and faculty alike. Students may use them for projects, though safeguards will aim to deter copy-paste work.

Faculty armed with advanced tools would deploy counterchecks to preserve originality, Metri said.

The institute is weighing evaluation of students' ability to use AI itself, by framing the right questions to extract meaningful answers, as part of academic assessment.

Key allies of Cong too condemn its shirtless protest at AI summit

Neha Shukla & Kumar Rakesh | TNN

Lucknow / Delhi: Youth Congress' eye-grabbing shirtless protest at the AI summit has left even some of the key allies of the opposition party frowning upon it, with Samajwadi Party boss Akhilesh Yadav saying a demonstration that insults the country in front of foreign leaders should have been avoided. Another India bloc partner, RJD also disapproved of Youth Congress's conduct which has been justified by Congress.

Several parties, which are not aligned with either BJP or Congress, were forceful in their denunciation of the protest, even as Congress doubled down, calling Mahatma Gandhi a "shirtless Congressi" to back its youth members currently in police custody. Former Andhra Pradesh CM Y S R Jagan Reddy said that it shamed everyone and BSP supremo Mayawati slammed the "half-naked" protest as extremely tasteless and condemnable. Noting that it was an international summit, former UP CM said the country's dignity and image should not have been targeted.

Another former UP CM and close Congress ally Akhilesh was unequivocal in his disapproval of the protest. "Such a protest should not have been held that insults your country in front of foreign delegates," he said.

Plan to include Aurobindo's edu into mainstream

Puducherry: National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and Auroville Foundation have proposed inclusion of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of integral education into the mainstream national system.

A team of officials from NCERT's department of teacher education held discussions with Auroville Foundation secretary Jayanti S Ravi and Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research executive L Aunmen, focusing on holistic development that transcends traditional rote learning and standardised testing.

The central theme of the dialogue was the 'triple challenge' framework — a pilot programme for secondary students from classes IX to XII that replaces high-stakes exams with personal challenges in physical fitness, socio-emotional learning, and mental research. TNN

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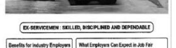

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Assam to be infiltrator-free in 5 yrs if BJP continues to govern: Shah

Prabin.Kalita@timesofindia.com

Guwahati: Union home minister Amit Shah accused opposition parties of turning "infiltrators" into a vote bank and pledged Saturday that if BJP retains govt in Assam, illegal immigrants will be struck off electoral rolls and deported from India within five years.

Shah said PM Narendra Modi has the "courage, determination and firm resolve to free the country's land from infiltrators", adding that such action requires a supportive state govt and "would never be possible" if the opposition assumes office after upcoming assembly elections. Illegal immigration remains a flashpoint in Assam, which borders Bangladesh. Bengali-speaking Muslims of Bangladeshi origin — often called "Miya" and estimated by govt at more than one crore — were central to the anti-foreigner agitation of the 1980s.

Amit Shah was speaking at the foundation stone-laying ceremony of the Assam Police 10th Battalion headquarters

Shah said EC's summary revision of electoral rolls is aimed at identifying infiltrators, but alleged "the leader of opposition has launched protests against it". "The country will certainly be freed from infiltrators. Under our govt, the country is becoming free from Naxalism, and in the same way, Assam and the entire nation will also become free from infiltrators," he said, drawing a parallel with Union govt's push against Maoist insurgency.

He was speaking at the foundation stone-laying ceremony of Assam Police 10th Battalion headquarters at Kachutoli near Guwahati, on land cleared of encroachers in 2024. "During opposition party's govt, infiltrators had encroached upon 174 bighas of land, which has now been freed from their possession by CM Himanta Biswa Sarma," he said, adding the new battalion was being established "at the very place from where security challenges had once emerged".

He said land occupied by infiltrators had posed a threat to Guwahati and Assam's development and warned that demographic changes had reached "a dangerous level" under previous govts. He named Dhubri, Barpeta, Morigaon, Darrang, Bongaigaon and Nagaon as areas he alleged had become "infiltrator-dominated". Shah accused opposition parties of endangering Assam's identity by handing over fertile land and undermining "jati, mati, bheti" —identity, land and homeland. He also targeted IMDT Act of 1983, alleging it was enacted "with the sole objective of facilitating infiltrators".

Praising CM Sharma, he said more than 1.4 lakh govt jobs had been provided "without corruption".

Over 1.7cr struck off poll rolls of 9 states/UTs covered by SIR ph II

Bharti.Jain@timesofindia.com

New Delhi: With nine of the 12 states covered in phase 2 of special intensive revision (SIR) having published their final electoral roll, including six on Saturday, their combined electorate is down 7.9% to 19.7 crore, as compared to 21.4 crore at the time of announcement of SIR exercise on Oct 27, 2025.

Over 1.7 crore electors have been struck off the electoral rolls of the nine states/UTs — Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Kerala, MP, Rajasthan, Lakshadweep, Puducherry, Goa and Andaman & Nicobar Islands — on account of SIR. While the final electoral rolls of Gujarat, Puducherry and Lakshadweep were published earlier, those for MP, Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Rajasthan, Goa and Andaman & Nicobar were published on Saturday.

Interestingly, the range of net decline in electors at the end of SIR varies from a steep 16.9% in Andaman & Nicobar and 13.4% in Gujarat to just 0.3% in Lakshadweep and 3.2% in Kerala. While four of the nine states/UTs recorded net declines above the 7.9% overall average, it was the opposite in five states/UTs.

Three states — West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu — are yet to publish their final electoral roll as part of SIR phase 2. While Tamil Nadu's roll will be out on Feb 25, the timeline for West Bengal is Feb 28 and for UP, April 10.

AT 13.4%, HIGHEST NET DECLINE IN GUJ

- Among 6 states where SIR has been concluded, Guj sees highest net decline in electorate since start of SIR, at 68L or 13.4%. **Chhattisgarh's electorate shrinks by 11.8% and Goa's by 10.7%**
- **Among UTs, only Andaman and Nicobar sees a sharp net decline of 16.9% in its electors.** Puducherry electorate is 7.6% less than what it was on Oct 27, 2025; the decline in Lakshadweep is just over 0.3%
- **Bengal, UP and TN are yet to publish their final electoral roll** as part of SIR phase II

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Affluent Professional Educated Business Agarwal Sr. Advocate / Judge family of Delhi / London, Networth Multi-Crore staying in Independent Houses in South Delhi / London, Seeking Match for Very H'Some 34Yrs,6'1" Lawyer Son (LLM London), and Very B'Ful, Slim Daughter 30Yrs, 5'4" / British Lawyer Partner with leading US Law Firm in London. (Caste no bar) WhatsApp: 8826819445 agarwal6352@gmail.com

BRAHMIN

B.TECH & Masters in Project Managmt & Business Devolmt, Brahmin boy, 9.8.96 born, 5'7", Wkg as Business Devolmt Exe in reputed MNC in Chennai, 18LPA, Mother working as School Sr Principal, Father - Retd Bank Mangr seeks professionally Qualifd Working girl. WhatsApp [illegible]

SEEKING alliance match for Delhi based Maithil Brahmin Boy Sandilya Gotra, 34/5'10" MBA working in an Indian MNC (IT Sector), native place Godda Dist., Jharkhand. Looking for educated and beautiful preferably working Girl. Mobile [illegible]

GAUR BRAHMIN Mglk boy 12/9/95, 5'9", BE chemical, wkg IT, Bangalore 65 LPA, Father Dr. Mother Gnd. Gtr Bly bsd Bhopal. Seeks edu. suitable girl. [illegible]

SM4 47/6' B.Tech+MBA Brahmin boy, Clean divorcee, wkg abroad in MNC, veg, teetotaller, non-manglik, [illegible]

GUJARATI Brahmin Boy 1997 / 5.6" working in MNC at Chennai requires a suitable match. Contact [illegible]

KAYASTHA

B.TECH /MBA boy 93/5'10". Wkg MNC Bangalore 35 LPA. Seeks Prof. Qual. Wkg. girl. [illegible]

BENGALI Kayastha, 30/ 5.2", Deva Gana, B.Tech, Working in MNC Bangalore with 16 LPA. Educated, Fair, Pretty bride required. [illegible]

WANTED working girl for 34, non.m kysth boy 5.6.6ft working as Senior Creative Officer in New Delhi. Contact no. [illegible]

SUITABLE Match for handsome Kayasth boy from reputed family B.Tech, MBA [illegible]

KHATRI

45/5'9" TALL divorcee belongs to high status family prefer middle and upper class beautiful very fair bride contact [illegible]

BRIDE WANTED [illegible] CONTACT: 6207121650

KUSHWAHA

KUSHWAHA H'some Boy 27/5'7"MCA Engr Google Banglr 38 LPA Seeks Bful Wkg girl [illegible]

TAMIL IYER

CHENNAI propertied unmarried Iyer male 55/ MA DFT Project coordinator media seeks any graduate brahmin woman except divorcee [illegible]

WANTED a bride for postgraduate 1994 Tamil Iyer boy Kousikam, Thiruvathirai, working in MNC in Chennai. Contact [illegible]

SEEKING affectionate, employed, good looking girl, for a cultured, 94 born, 5.7, teetotaller, BTech, own company, Bangalore, Palakkad Iyer, Kaundinya, Visagam boy, from upper middle-class well-settled family. Knows Tamil, Hindi, English [illegible]

TAMIL UDAYAR

35/5.5FT, Wheetah, Visagam, 1st Marriage, working in Pvt. Co. Chennai. Seeks bride from Any Caste, Divorcee / Widow (No Issue). Ct: [illegible]

BY COMMUNITY

AGARWAL

SMART Gupta (Vaishya) 30/5'9" MBA 35LPA Associate Director Analytics working in Banglore UP Based family seeks Bride MBA, B.Tech [illegible]

LOOKING FOR BRIDE
Goel, Dec 95 / 5'11", Germany based, MS Automotive from Germany. Pure Vegetarian, Non-Drinker, Non-Smoker Healthy boy. Seek suitable Girl having Foreign education background / staying abroad, willing to go abroad. Caste No Bar. Family well settled in Posh South Delhi, Both Parents CA Professionals.
9811080264

AGARWAL

SMART Varshney (Vaishya) [illegible]

BY PROFESSION

DOCTORS

DM Doctor (Dec 81,6'), Tamil seeks a tall, v.fair, virtuous PG Doctor/non-medico age around 30 yrs at Bangalore [illegible]

BRIDE for 28 Yr/ 5'9" [illegible]

SOFTWARE PROFESSIONALS

996/ 5'8" BITS Pilani Grad. Software Engineer Amazon Pkg: 80L+, Veg/Teetotaler, Own Villa Bangalore. WhatsApp [illegible]

BY RELIGION

HINDU

BRAHMIN boy 89/180, Good looking Good Income Own House Non Veg Chennai seeks Good looking brahmin bride North Indian also but 29 to 37 yrs. Ph [illegible]

SM4 Doha based Hindu Mudaliyar / Iyer 95, handsome 5'11", BTech. Seeks alliance from well educated, working, broad minded girl based abroad / India. Ct: [illegible]

DELHI [illegible]

MUSLIM

SUNNI 29 Y USA MIM Graduate & B.Tech (Mech) owning business in USA & UAE seeks convent educated bride willing to settle abroad. Educated & Reputed Family background is a Must. Whatsapp biodata to +[illegible]

ALLIANCE invited for SHIA MUSLIM Boy 6 Feet, Fair, Handsome 34 Years, Senior Management Position, Financially well secure, Good Family background and values. Looking for Well Educated, Good looking SHIA GIRL. Contact [illegible]

GENERAL

CASTE NO BAR

SM4 Dubai based Kashmiri Hindu boy, 42 years / 5' 11", not married, B Tech, MBA, MS in Big 4 firm. Seeks qualified girl from any decent family. Email [illegible]

B.Engg/Masters in Engineering Brahmin boy Dec 1995/ 5'10' Wkg Asst Manager reputed firm Mumbai 16LPA, Parents Government employees seeks Prof Qual working girl. Whatsapp [illegible]

SEEKING a Hindu Rajput bride with rooted values in Dehradun, Bangalore settled. Boy well settled in Bangalore at a senior position in a reputed organisation. DOB 11th April 1996, Ht. 5'6", PoB Dehradun, ToB 12:40 Hrs. WhatsApp [illegible]

WANTED: Homely, educated girl For 34 Tech Engineer, 6'0", UK-based Handsome with pleasing personality Well-settled family, Chandigarh Working girls preferred in abroad Biodata & photo invited on Email: [illegible]

SEEKING suitable alliance for Punjabi khatri non manglik handsome boy (MBBS Mumbai, Master's degree from Sweden), Working in Netherlands. Girl preference: highly educated (preferably MBBS/MD or Engineer). Caste no bar. Mobile [illegible]

32 yrs, 5'9", Fair, SC, BE, [illegible] working in FinTech, Ed Tech entrepreneur; Bureaucrat parents, very affluent Telugu family at Hyderabad. Seeking well-educated bride (any caste) from good affluent family. Contact: [illegible]

TAMIL SC Adidravida PR MTech IITK from Mumbai working at Bangalore IT 31/180 cm 90L seeks suitable educated bride preferably from Bangalore/ Mumbai/ Chennai simple marriage Caste No Bar Ph: [illegible]

1994 /5'8" BE wrkg Lead Stanchart GBS Bengaluru CTC 36 LPA. Father Ex IPS. Brother wrkg Amazon London. [illegible]

PHD, BTech IIT, Univ. Professor, US Green Card, Never Married, 45 yrs, 5' 7", Teetotaler, Vegetarian, Seeks bride below 37, No Caste bar. [illegible]

SC b'some boy,38/5,10",B.Tech, MBA, 28 LPA, MNC, London Returned, Veg, Pref Wkg Girl, Govt/Pvt or B.Tech,MCA,MBA other Higher qual. [illegible]

PQM4 Handsome Brahmin, 31Yr, 5'10",BTech, MBA IIM, Teetotaler, Non Smoking, CTC 40LPA, Wking Gurugram [illegible]

AERONAUTICAL Engineer, 33years, 5.8' tall work in UAE Abudhabi Airlines, family living in Chennai, caste no bar, need suitable bride. [illegible]

MAURITIUS-BASED Hindu Handsome, Independent Unmarried 48/5'7' Dental Surgeon Seeks Suitable Match. Call: [illegible]

DY. Director (GST) march 86 /168cm divorcee, parents retired govt. seeks beautiful educated girl divorcee /widow/unmarried [illegible]

BRIDE for Kayasth boys [illegible]

COSMOPOLITAN

H'SM [illegible]

Seeking Hindu, cosmopolitan, working, unmarried 33-35 yrs bride for 43yrs groom, 180cm, very fair CA-MBA Marwari divorcee (no kids). Leads large finance co, lives independently in Mumbai. Send bio/photo vex226677@gmail.com

SECOND MARRIAGE

45LPA MNC Ph.D. IIT Jan 88/5'1. Mumbai. No Issue. Seeks Prof Qual Working Issueless Bride. Brahmin Pref. Call/WA [illegible]

RELIGION NO BAR

39/5'9", Unmarried, Agarwal (Caste No Bar), B.Tech [illegible]

Unmarried [illegible]

BY NATIONALITY

NRI/ GREEN CARD

USA (California bsd well qlfd. Non-manglik Brahmin boy, 5'9"/ 89 born Tlsss divorcee (Short marriage) seeks prof. qlfd. US bsd girl.Cast no bar. [illegible]

GAUR [illegible]

PQM [illegible]

WANTED GROOMS

BY CASTE

JAIN

ALLIANCE INVITED
South Delhi based Jain family seeks alliance for daughter, born January 1997, 5'6", slim, graceful, highly qualified. Graduate from Lady Shri Ram College (DU); MBA from Stanford University, USA. Value-oriented, with a balanced traditional and global outlook. Vegetarian Jain.
Seeking well-educated, well-settled, cultured match from a reputed Jain/Agarwal vegetarian family, professional/ business background, metro city preferred.
Contact with detailed biodata on WhatsApp:
99908 94400

BRAHMIN

MD [illegible]

GROOM Gen Caste within 36 wanted for a Bengali Brahmin Girl 35/ 5'3"PG ECONOMICS Sr Manager MNC at Bengaluru 40 LPA. [illegible]

BY LANGUAGE

MALAYALI

ALLIANCE sought for 39-year Malayali boy, Athul Unnithan, 171cm Rohini (Kumbham-3). Caste: Hindu Nair B.Com, Dip. Hotel Mgmt. Accounts & Admin Manager in Hyderabad. Father retired journalist, Mother Housewife, one brother married (77) Native: Kollam. Contact: [illegible]

BENGALI

WELL-RAISED Bengali boy 41/5'5", 41 LPA MNC Bengaluru seeks an Unmarried, beautiful, educated, values peace and willing to live abroad Bengali girl, not exceeding 37/5'2" [illegible]

TELUGU

BRIDE wanted for Dr (DM Cardio) Telugu Naidu Bangalore based only child 85 handsome 5' Working in a corporate hospital family financially well off seeking well educated & settled girls even non medical also ok from general category only. Contact - [illegible]

BR girl April [illegible]

AGARWAL - BISA

PQSM [illegible]

KAYASTHA

KAYASTHA girl,Sep 86,5'7",b'Ful,Sr.Manager MNC,35 LPA,MBA ISB Hydb.,MBA+Engg NMIMS Mum.,seeks well settled boy in India from Civil Service or Corporate,IIT/IIM/ equivalent.UCNB.Contact [illegible]

PHD [illegible]

BY COMMUNITY

ARORA

TEETOTALER [illegible]

AGARWAL

1997/5'6" High EQ, compassionate, intellectual, spiritual girl BA LLB (NLIU) + Awareness Coach. Family progressive, educated, open minded. Looking for ambitious and established partner. Kindly share profile: [illegible]

SMART NIT IIM Consultant in Top MNC 29/5'3" brahmin. PQM from IIT/IIM/ IIIT/MBA (Tier I)/MS/Edu. Entrepreneur /general category,veg,aggtn. Invited [illegible]

PQM4 35/164, slim, fair, Garg girl,BTech(IIT/TU),MBA (Germany), Sr. Position leading Auto MNC Germany, Father Retd. PSU Offr,stld NCR. [illegible]

GARG MBA-IT BTech AUG 91/5'5" NM Sr Mgr Giant MNC Bengaluru Affluent fmly NCR Seek Hindu NM PQ IIT/IIM/Eq W'App Bio [illegible]

South Delhi based high status Vaish business family into business of hospitality, and Export Services looking match for their daughter 28/5'3", charming, educated, masters from abroad wish to hear from high status business or professional family from India & abroad.
Contact 9811109134
Or Mail Us At Ks49598@gmail.com

RAJPUT

RAJPUT, Bisen,Vats, 90/5'5" Fair MBA/B.Tech girl in MNC,Father Ex-MP. Seeks Class I Officer/IIT-IIM in MNC. Call: [illegible]

M.TECH [illegible]

BY PROFESSION

DOCTORS

SUITABLE match for twin daughters studying in the UK 2.5/30 yrs from grooms either residing in UK or Mumbai. Caste no bar. Contact father on WhatsApp [illegible]

MBA/CA

MBA (IIM) girl [illegible] Wkg. MNC(Pune). Father retd.CMD. Seeks highly qualified boy. Kshtriyasthi upper caste are accepted. No dowry. [illegible]

BY RELIGION

CHRISTIAN

CHENNAI settled Catholic parents seek suitable alliance for their daughter 29/158 cm; B.Tech, MS., working in Europe. Prefer proposals from boys who are in Europe. Contact: [illegible]

HINDU

SUITABLE match for sarswat Brahmin girl, 5' 2.5" 29/10/91, 6:25 AM, Chandigarh. Software Engineer in Bangalore. 42 LPA. Parents into business and farming. Reputed family. Mob: [illegible]

MALAYALI- Doctor (MD-Dermatology) girl, 31 based at Bangalore, Kshana seeks professional, qualified, well settled groom from Hindu educated family. [illegible]

WANTED a groom [illegible]

PQM4 [illegible]

MS [illegible]

AGE 30 issueless Divorcee ACS Working in MNC seeks issueless groom CNB Contact: [illegible]

MUSLIM

SUNNI Muslim, never married, female, 41 years old, 168 cm tall, MS, PhD, MBA (all degrees from the USA), senior pharma AI executive, well settled in the US. Seeks sunni muslim male, preferably never married or widowed/divorced with no kids, 40 - 50 years old, over 172 cm tall, well educated and well settled in the US. Email: [illegible] Mobile [illegible]

SIKH

REPUTED [illegible]

GENERAL

CASTE NO BAR

MATCH for Punjabi Prajapati Girl 1990,5'4", B.Com, LLB, working in Hyderabad in Wells Fargo Bank group company earning Rs.60000 monthly. Caste No bar. Preferred Hindu boy settled/ working in Hyderabad. [illegible]

GOOD Looking, Fair, Charming, Kayastha Girl, 1993/ 5.5", MBA Great Lake Institute, Sr. Manager Global Co., Working Mumbai, Affluent Jaipur Family. WA- [illegible]

RAJPUT lawyer girl 91/5'7" practising in DHC coming from high status family seeks professionally qualified boy. [illegible]

PQSM4 Sikh girl, June 96, smart, PG Diploma, B.Com, Working as Agility Lead in US MNC Hyderabad. Cont. [illegible]

SM4 Kayasth Girl October 89/5'6"/fair/B.Tech. from IIT plus MBA (USA), 90 LPA works in Bangalore. Caste no bar. Phone: [illegible]

CHENNAI Fair 44 yrs Innocent Divorcee 5'3" B.E. IELTS Trainer L.L.M Intl Law seeks match strictly frm only Police Officers. [illegible]

STD BTech, M.Tech girl (SC), Jul 98 Str. Wrkg Bir Seeks professional qualified boy Caste no bar. Contact: [illegible]

Wanted Groom
Suitable Family
Match for Kshatriya Rajput girl 31/163 CMS. Business, Master's from reputed University, lives in Bhopal. Father is a Businessman. Family is affluent with high net Worth. Proposal expected from settled Business/Political/Civil Servant Families.
Contact: 9425057871 (whatsapp)

CA, smart, slim Punjabi girl [illegible]

LOOKING [illegible]

SC/ST

PQM [illegible]

SECOND MARRIAGE

SM4 Veg Agarwal bful 1986, 5'7 PG in mgt tech wking as consulting one in a leading MNC in NCR. NS, living with a child. WAPP [illegible]

MUMBAI based 34 years, Christian/ Punjabi. Divorcee, Issueless. Sr. Cabin Crew with Air India, Only Pilots/ Indian Defence Grooms. Ph: [illegible]

BY LANGUAGE

BENGALI

SM4 Mumbai 1992 born 5'5" Slim fair B'Tal Bengali Brahmin girl, Working in National Carrier (Airlines) at Delhi (Non Veg)Call: [illegible]

BENGALI [illegible]

GROOM WANTED
Delhi NCR (Gurgaon) based well-settled family seeks alliance for their good looking & bright daughter 28 yrs, 5'5" Miranda House - BA MSc-Christ University, presently practising Psychologist. Father, ex-MNC Senior Exec. Mother into Social service. Looking for Progressive, Professionally Educated, Bengali Brahmin Grooms (29-33 yrs), working in India. Mail : [illegible]

PUNJABI

PQM from reputed well to do Family, for 166 cm, 36 yrs, very beautiful Punjabi girl, MBA, working in Delhi, father very senior officer in Central Govt. WA details/ photos: [illegible]

SINDHI

SEEKING [illegible]

TELUGU

GROOM wanted for Telugu Naidu only child Bangalore based well settled family 93 MS USA fair and beautiful 5.6', Working in California. Seeking for well educated & settled boys from Bangalore or USA, from general category only, girl willing to relocate to Bangalore only. Contact - [illegible]

BY NATIONALITY

NRI/ GREEN CARD

OUR daughter [illegible]

PARENTS of Mugavoora Girl, 31/5'3", V.Fair, Smart, B.E. Comp. Sc - MS USA, H1B, Wkg Dallas, Texas, Seek Suitably QfD. Match, Well Setld in USA. Send Details: [illegible]

MBA [illegible]

PQM frm premier edu Instut fr girl 36/5'4" wrkg in MNC Canada (PR), edu fmly NCR. Pfr PR/Ctzn boy wrkg Canada, edu fmly. [illegible]

SM4 bful Punjabi Hindu girl, Aug 96/5'4", MSc (French), wkg MNC, DUBAI. Doctor parents. Seek qualfd, 30-34, tall NRI boy [illegible]

PQ [illegible]

PQM4 [illegible]

43 Yr butiful very fair wrg in euro [illegible]

BRIDES & GROOMS

TAMIL, SCA,32Yrs,Son,MS, MBA 17LPA; Daughters,29Yrs B.Tech,MBA,13LPA,IT& 26Yrs Bsc seek suitable Brides&Grooms,CNB [illegible]

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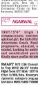
ELITE BRIDES WANTED

BRAHMIN IYER, 28, 183 cms, Entrepreneur, Masters in Management. Lives in [illegible]. Father is a Businessman. Family is financially well off. Looking for a suitable match. Contact: [illegible]

GOUNDER, 41, 173 cms, Divorced, Businessman, Bachelors. Lives in Bangalore. Father is a Businessman. Family is financially well off. Looking for a suitable match. Contact: [illegible]

NAYAKA, 30, 173 cms, Doctor, Pursuing DM. Lives in Mysore. Parents are Doctors. Family is financially well off. Looking for a like minded match. Contact: [illegible]

BALIJA NAIDU, 33, 185 cms, Business Analyst, Bachelors in Management. Lives in Bangalore. Father is a Businessman. Family is financially well off. Looking for a suitable match. Contact: [illegible]



ELITE GROOMS WANTED

BRAHMIN IYER, 27, 160 cms, Finance & Accounts Professional, MBA in Accounting and Finance. Lives in Chennai. Parents are Working Professionals. Family is affluent and lives in Chennai. Looking for a suitable match. Contact: [illegible]

ARYA VYSYA, 30, 152 cms, Software Professional, Masters. Lives in USA. Father is a Businessman. Family is financially well off and lives in Bangalore. Looking for a compatible match. Contact: [illegible]

BALIJA NAIDU, 31, 157 cms, Divorced, Software Professional, Masters in Engg. Lives in Bangalore. Father is a working professional. Family is financially well off. Looking for a like minded match. Contact: [illegible]

VOKKALIGA, 26, 163 cms, Software Professional, Bachelors in Engg. Lives in Bangalore. Family is financially well off and lives in Bangalore. Looking for a suitable match. Contact: [illegible]

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$22bn to bust: The default that sealed Byju's fall

The edtech major's fall hit a new inflection point in Dec 2025, when a US court issued a $1.07bn default judgment tied to the disputed $533mn Alpha funds, even as founder Byju Raveendran denies wrongdoing and battles insolvency and creditor claims across continents

Supriya.Roy@timesofindia.com

On a winter afternoon in late 2022, Byju Raveendran stood on a stage in Bengaluru addressing a hall packed with founders, investors, policymakers and journalists. India's most valuable startup founder spoke with the conviction of someone building a global education empire. "Every year, in the last five years, we have invested $200 million into our product development... in the last six years, we have invested $1.3 billion in creating our product," he told the room. It was the kind of line he would continue repeating even as his company tumbled from a $22 billion valuation into a bankrupt, litigation-ridden entity.

At that moment, no one in the audience anticipated what the next three years would bring. But there were signs.

Days earlier, the company had simultaneously laid off employees amid a post-pandemic slowdown in edtech and unveiled Lionel Messi as its global brand ambassador. The contrast added an undercurrent of unease to the event.

When the panel discussion ended, Raveendran stood up with his co-founder and wife Divya Gokulnath, answering questions directly from the floor. The session quickly took on the air of a classroom he once taught in, hands raised, voices calling out. When he defended the company's strategy, a previously quiet crowd erupted, shouting, "Byju, you are a hero." After the session, he moved to a cordoned-off area of the hotel restaurant. Attendees lined up to speak with him one-on-one.

At its peak, Byju's had grown from a coaching class in Kerala into India's largest edtech brand, and for many founders he embodied the speed and ambition of the country's startup boom.

Three years later, that empire is fighting for survival in courts across two continents.

The story of Byju's is no longer defined by hypergrowth. It now includes large borrowings, aggressive expansion, governance failures, insolvency proceedings, missing funds, creditor battles and legal orders written in unusually sharp language. The latest is a $1.07 billion default judgment issued by the Delaware Bankruptcy Court in Nov 2025, a murky case involving allegations of $533 million being siphoned off, which Raveendran has denied.

For an entrepreneur who once symbolised India's new business ambition, the descent is among the most dramatic reversals in the country's startup history.

A Meteoric Rise

Byju Raveendran's rise began far from the boardrooms he would later frequent. He grew up in Ashikode, a quiet coastal village near Kannur, where his parents taught physics and mathematics in a local govt school. He studied in the same school before enrolling in the Govt Engineering College in Kannur in the late 1990s.

He followed a rhythm familiar to many small-town students: commuting by bus, clearing back papers through last-minute 'night outs', and reserving his real competitiveness for the cricket field. The inflection point came later, when he scored 100 percentile in the CAT exam twice, convincing him that he didn't want to work for anyone else. That confidence eventually propelled him into teaching aptitude classes, filling stadiums, and ultimately giving birth to what would become India's largest edtech brand, in 2011.

By 2017, Byju's had captured the early smartphone-first education market, backed by Sequoia Capital, a Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, and Tiger Global. Its explainer-style videos resonated with urban middle-class families, and its revenue grew as exams grew more competitive. The company's marketing became hard to miss: full front-page ads, hoardings, sponsorship of the Indian cricket team and also the 2022 Fifa World Cup in Qatar. For many parents, Byju's became synonymous with online learning.

The pandemic supercharged the story. Locked inside their homes, families across cities and smaller towns turned to screens for schooling. Byju's added millions of users. International investors chased the India consumption narrative; the company raised over $4 billion.

Flush with capital, Raveendran began a global acquisition spree — WhiteHat Jr, Aakash Educational Services, Great Learning, Epic, Osmo, Tynker. At one point, the company was negotiating multiple billion-dollar acquisitions simultaneously.

Internally, employees recall a founder who worked late, answered emails at odd hours, and believed every deal could be pulled off with enough conviction. The company's underwriting of new ventures often relied on the same faith.

But scale masked strain. The company had few integration controls. Leadership churn intensified. Auditors flagged delays. Revenues repeatedly came in lower than projections. And the aggressive expansion model hid an important fact: the company was burning cash faster than it could stabilise.

It delayed filing the 2021-22 results of its parent company, Think & Learn, till early 2024. The company's losses had nearly doubled to $1 billion.

The Turning Point

By mid-2023, the company's buyout appetite required larger pools of capital. That is when Byju's raised a $1.2 billion Term Loan B, typical of private-equity-style financing and unusual for an Indian startup. The loan was raised through Byju's Alpha, a Delaware-registered special-purpose vehicle (SPV).

The structure mattered: the lenders had tight enforcement rights, and the SPV created a separate chain of control outside India. The money was meant to fund global acquisitions. But as filings later revealed, the company also relied on the loan to support operations, marketing and expansion.

Tensions with lenders emerged as early as 2022. Revenue forecasts were missed. Audits were delayed. The loan became the primary centre of a long-running conflict between the company and its creditors.

By 2023, the unpaid interest, missed disclosures, and uncertainty around the use of funds led lenders to appoint Glas Trust Company as agent. Glas exercised enforcement rights to take control of Byju's Alpha, replacing the board with an independent manager.

From that moment onward, Raveendran lost control of the US entity that had borrowed the $1.2 billion, and also lost control of how its records would be interpreted in court.

A $533-Million Question

At the heart of the Delaware case is the movement of $533 million, now referred to as the Alpha Funds. According to filings in the US proceedings, those funds were transferred in 2022 to OCI Ltd, a UK supply-chain services firm. For nearly two years, the path of that money remained contested.

In Nov 2025, that path returned to the spotlight when the Byju's Alpha bankruptcy estate filed a motion seeking approval of a settlement with OCI. Attached to that motion was a sworn declaration from Oliver Chapman, OCI's director, describing how the funds moved after reaching OCI's accounts.

According to the motion reviewed by TOI, the estate said Chapman stated that "the vast majority" of the $533 million was moved to Byju's Global Pte Ltd, a Singapore entity the debtor described as individually owned by Raveendran. The filing characterised the movement as funds being "in effect, round-tripped".

These are allegations, not findings. But Chapman's declaration became a pivotal piece of the narrative. "A company's borrowings can't simply circle back for the founder to buy equity — that's not how corporate finance works," someone who has worked closely with the organisation told TOI. "And that's why the round-tripping allegation hits so sharply."

Raveendran has denied the claims, saying in earlier filings that the funds were used for legitimate commercial purposes, including procurement, payments and expansion, and that neither he nor other founders personally benefitted.

A Legal Setback

The declaration landed days before the Delaware court issued its strongest order yet: a default judgment against Raveendran.

In the 23-page opinion, the court concluded that he repeatedly missed deadlines, filed incomplete responses, ignored discovery orders and failed to appear at required times. The judge wrote that lesser sanctions, including a $10,000-per-day contempt order earlier in the year, had not compelled compliance.

Because of that non-participation, the court ruled in favour of the plaintiffs on all counts, awarding damages totalling $1.07 billion and requiring a full accounting of the Alpha Funds and the transferred Camshaft partnership interest.

The order stressed that the judgment was procedural — not a determination of fraud on the merits. It was issued because the court concluded it could not move forward with a defendant who refused to cooperate.

FT Report Makes Matters Worse

Earlier this week, the Financial Times did an investigative report on Byju's. A fallen Indian tech star and the hunt for its missing millions'.

According to this report, Glas managed to identify bank transfers worth $533 million to Camshaft Capital, set up in 2020 by one William Morton, who had no formal investment qualification. The fund managed less than $10 million, and at one point its official address was a pancake chain called IHOP in Miami's Little Havana.

Lawyers for the lenders alleged Camshaft was chosen "to conceal money", according to the FT report. Meanwhile, Camshaft's fund administrator told the court that the loan proceeds were wired to UK's supply-chain company OCI.

Perhaps the most damning revelations in the FT report are the allegations made by William Hailer, the Nebraska-based chief executive of advisory firm Rose Lake. Hailer had just been listed as a witness at the Delaware court, when late last Nov, he says he got "four calls in quick succession" from Raveendran. Hailer had been in touch with Raveendran the previous year, and had met him twice in Dubai. In Dubai, he found Raveendran's behaviour odd. Raveendran carried three phones, isolated people for one-on-one meetings and used personal email accounts. During one interaction, Raveendran opened ChatGPT revealing a previous search for 'How to defend against corporate fraud accusation'.

According to FT: 'Hailer also claimed that when Raveendran discovered he was set to testify, he sent him a plane ticket to Dubai that would place him outside the US on the day he was due in court. Hailer was allegedly promised a $300,000 job, equity, as well as housing and schooling for his children, but he declined.'

"Byju has demonstrated a willingness to bend, sidestep and break both the law and reality in order to have a revival of his company and his brands," Hailer said in a declaration, the FT report added.

Defence Pushes Back

When TOI reached out to Byju's after the Delaware court ruling became public, Raveendran's counsel said they would appeal the judgment.

In a statement on behalf of Raveendran, he said that the ruling was "issued on an expedited basis" and that the court had "ignored relevant facts." It stated that the default judgment "deprived Byju of the presentation of a defence" and that he had been unable to respond adequately due to time constraints and the complexity of the proceedings.

The defence also reiterated that the Alpha funds "were not used by Byju Raveendran or any founder for their personal gain but were used for the benefit of 'think & Learn'".

It further claimed that the lender-appointed agent had "misled" the Delaware court — an assertion the ruling did not address. The statement added that Raveendran and other founders intend to file US federal claims seeking $2.5 billion in damages, alleging obstruction and misconduct.

Indian Battles Continue

While the Delaware case intensifies, Byju's is simultaneously under corporate insolvency proceedings in India. The National Company Law Tribunal admitted Think & Learn into insolvency in 2024. A Resolution Professional now oversees the process.

Legal activity in India continues on multiple fronts, including the Enforcement Directorate's investigation of alleged FEMA violations and the RBI's review of the company's financial transactions.

Former employees, meanwhile, have filed wage claims. Vendors have approached courts over pending dues. Investors have written down their holdings significantly. And the once-acquisitive group has shed assets, downsized teams and vacated offices across India and abroad.

A Founder's Arc

Inside India's startup ecosystem, opinions about Raveendran remain divided.

Some of his early investors describe him as a builder who chased scale faster than the company could absorb, driven by the belief that Indian startups could compete globally. Others argue that the company became dependent on leverage, optimistic projections and overextended acquisitions that were not fully integrated.

Those who worked with him recall a founder who saw ambition as an engine, not a risk. For years, that mindset made Byju's a generational story, the kind that turns a teacher into a billionaire-entrepreneur with global recognition.

But ambition hit limits. Today, the company that once set the pace for India's tech boom is navigating creditor actions, insolvency processes and litigation across jurisdictions. And the founder who once spoke of building the world's largest education company is fighting to defend himself in multiple courts.

It Ain't Over Till It's Over

The fall of Byju's is not yet complete, nor is it final. Appeals remain open. The Indian insolvency process will determine the company's future. Multiple legal questions, including the final fate of the $533 million, remain unresolved.

But the trajectory is unmistakable: Byju's has become one of the clearest case studies of India's startup excesses, financial complexity and governance challenges. And Raveendran's rise and reversal stands among the most dramatic arcs in Indian business history. Whether the company survives in any recognisable form, or whether the founder clears his name in ongoing legal challenges, will unfold over this year.

"I will not give up and continue to contribute to developed nation for the benefit of society as I have done my entire life," Raveendran, meanwhile, said in his statement to FT.

For now, the tale of Byju's is no longer just a startup story. It is a cautionary one.

Byju Raveendran

2007 | Byju Raveendran starts Byju's Classes. In 2011, founds Byju's Think & Learn Pvt Ltd

2021 | Raises $1.2bn from institutional investors in US

Mar 2022 | Company hits peak valuation of $22bn

Jun 2023 | Deloitte resigns as auditor amid signs of trouble

Nov 2023 | US court backs lenders' move to take control of Byju's Alpha — its US subsidiary — in $1.2bn loan dispute

Jul 2024 Insolvency proceedings opened against company

Dec 2025 | US court issues default judgment against Raveendran

An 'innovation programme' in Kolkata organised by Byju's and Aakash, one of the edtech giant's several high-profile acquisitions

The company's marketing was hard to miss. Apart from regular full front-page ads and hoardings, it became official sponsor of the Indian cricket team between Sept 2019 and March 2023. It was also an official sponsor of the Fifa World Cup in 2022

FORMER EMPLOYEES SPEAK UP

'STUDENTS WERE PROMISED DEDICATED COUNSELLOR, WHO DID NOT EXIST'

The overall atmosphere was built of unrealistic sales predictions, which were generally then forced on the teams below. It was very evident that these numbers were completely unachievable, at least not ethically.

Hence this led to mis-selling and false product commitments. Students were promised a dedicated counsellor, who did not exist, employees were also presented as "education counsellors", despite this being completely false, the product was sold as a miracle education tool which would transform a student's life. The organisation actively encouraged unethical mis-selling practices.

To top it all, variable pricing was encouraged, allowing higher amounts to be charged to vulnerable customers. The sales targets were unrealistic, often amounting to nearly Rs 2 lakh over a fortnight. Failing to meet these targets meant being compelled to work on weekly off days, effectively turning the job into a seven-day workweek. The workplace culture was toxic and intimidating. Managers routinely shouted at and publicly humiliated employees on the sales floor for missing targets.

The difficulties continued even after resignation. My full and final settlement was delayed, requiring repeated follow-ups and requests, and my experience letter was initially withheld, adding unnecessary stress to the exit process.

'MY SALES JOB WAS TO TRICK PARENTS INTO BUYING DREAMS'

I joined Byju's in June 2019 as a 'business development associate'. It was a sales role, and my responsibility was to meet parents of kids who were in classes 5 to 10 — and try to sell them the idea that we would provide them an exciting, new way to learn school stuff.

Fresh out of college, it seemed thrilling at first: our backend team provided leads on whom to visit — parents who had installed the free Byju's learning app on their phones. There were two 'products' to sell: a course for kids in classes 5-8; and one for those between classes 9-10. Should they say yes, they would get a tablet computer preloaded with the learning module of their choice.

The courses were not cheap, costing anywhere between Rs 70,000 and Rs 80,000 in all, tablet included. The real problem was that the 'target families' were overwhelmingly middle- and lower-middle class, most of whom could ill afford it. I quickly realised what the real game was: guilt the parents into buying the courses, offering loans — all from a particular lending agency we tied up with. Our seniors even encouraged us to make parents believe that they needed only to make a one-time payment of Rs 5,000, while making them sign an agreement for the entire amount. I lost count of the number of complaints we received from those who felt — rightfully — defrauded.

The teaching itself was deeply flawed. There was no provision for kids to ask questions to a teacher. Whatever came loaded on the tab was it.

I joined in June, and I quit in my papers mid-July. I am still in sales, but I have never mentioned my Byju's stint in subsequent job interviews. Tricking parents into buying dreams of a better future for their kids was just too much for my conscience. It's behind me now.

—Both former employees chose to remain anonymous

INQUIZITIVE

JOY BHATTACHARJYA

1 Which nine-letter word in the English language comes from the belief that it was caused by a supernatural spirit or goblin sitting on people's chests while they sleep?

2 Which of the eight celebrated Telugu poets in Vijayanagar ruler Krishnadevaraya's court was also known by the title 'Vikatakavi,' meaning 'jester poet'?

3 The reeds or ridges on coins were invented in the late 1600s so that people could not shave off the edges of silver or gold coins to collect the precious metal, and the practice is still in use. Which British scientist, who was also the Warden of the Royal Mint, started this practice?

4 What can come in the following shapes — candy bar or slab, clamshell, folding flip, book-style, tri-fold and slider?

5 Which American state, due to its unique geography, is the only place in the world where both alligators, which prefer freshwater, and crocodiles, which prefer brackish or salt water, are found?

6 Uhuru Peak is the highest point of which mountain, which actually comprises three volcanoes — Mawenzi, Shira and Kibo?

7 If the fighter jet Rafale gets its name from a gust of wind, which aircraft in the IAF gets its name from an optical illusion often seen in deserts and other hot places?

8 Which 2016 film is the highest-grossing Marathi film of all time and was also remade as 'Manasu Mallige' in Kannada, 'Channa Mereya' in Punjabi and 'Noor Jehan' in Bengali?

9 The 2026 Winter Olympics is the first to be co-hosted by two cities. While skiing and other outdoor events are held around Cortina d'Ampezzo, which city is hosting most of the ice events?

10 In which religion is the place of worship always built in the shape of a octagon, with nine sides, as the religion associates that number with unity and completeness?

ANSWERS

1 | Nightmare
2 | Tenali Rama
3 | Sir Isaac Newton
4 | Mobile phones
5 | Florida — the Everglades
6 | Mount Kilimanjaro
7 | Mirage (the Mirage 2000)
8 | Sairat
9 | Milan
10 | The Bahai faith

Developed India only when it becomes self-reliant: PM

Lays Foundation Stone For HCL-Foxconn Chip Maker Off Yamuna Eway

Aditya.Dev@timesofindia.com

Noida: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday framed India's push into semiconductors as central to building a self-reliant nation, saying the country's development depended on making critical chips at home and creating a trusted supply chain for the world.

"A developed India can only be achieved when the country becomes self-reliant. For that, it is extremely important that chips are made in India," he said.

The PM made the remarks while virtually laying the foundation stone of India Chip Private Limited — a joint venture between HCL Group and Foxconn — for an outsourced semiconductor assembly and test (OSAT) facility in Sector 28 of Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development Authority (YEIDA) region.

PM Modi speaks during the groundbreaking ceremony of the HCL-Foxconn joint venture project, India Chip Pvt Ltd, via video conferencing, Saturday

The advanced facility, planned with an investment of about Rs 3,700 crore, is expected to be operational by 2028. It will manufacture display driver integrated circuits (DDICs) and is designed to process 20,000 wafers a month. The project is projected to generate more than 3,500 jobs, while also spurring local supply chains and ancillary industries.

Those present at the site were chief minister Yogi Adityanath and Union minister for railways, information and broadcasting and electronics & IT Ashwini Vaishnaw. HCL Group chairperson Roshni Nadar Malhotra and her Hon Hai Technology Group (Foxconn) counterpart Young Liu also attended the event.

In his address, Modi described semiconductors as the backbone of digital economy, linking them to everyday services and strategic sectors. "Whether it is digital India, artificial intelligence, 5G, 6G, electric vehicles, medical devices or defence equipment —semiconductors are essential components in all of them. Without chips, modern life comes to a standstill," he said.

He also drew a broader geopolitical comparison to underline why chip capability mattered. "In the 20th century, nations that possessed oil gained prosperity and power. In the 21st century, that same power lies in small chips and in the skills and materials associated with them. Chips are the digital diamonds of modern era," he said.

Pointing to the effect on global manufacturing, Modi said the pandemic exposed how vulnerable chip supply chains were. "We saw how fragile the global chip supply chain was. When disruptions occurred, factories across the world came to a halt, automobile production slowed, and electronics manufacturing was severely affected," he said, adding that India chose to treat the crisis as an opening. "We resolved to make India self-reliant in chip manufacturing and to build a trusted semiconductor supply chain for the world."

According to the Prime Minister, the Noida unit could act as an anchor for a wider technology cluster.

Put US trade deal 'on hold', renegotiate, Cong tells govt

New Delhi: Congress on Saturday demanded that the govt "put on hold" the Indo-US trade deal in view of the decision of the United States Supreme Court invalidating the reciprocal tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump and "renegotiate" the terms of the deal.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of being "compromised", alleging that his (Modi's) "betrayal" in the India-US interim trade deal now stands exposed. "He can't renegotiate. He will surrender again," Gandhi alleged in a post on X.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge questioned the Modi govt. "Clueless foreign policy or one-sided surrender? Why did the Modi govt not wait for the US Supreme Court judgement on tariffs before rushing to fall into a trap deal, which extracted huge concessions from India?", Kharge asked in a post on X.

Addressing a press conference, Congress general secretary in charge communications Jairam Ramesh said that there was a provision in the 'Framework of Interim Agreement' that in case of one country modifying the terms, the other country can also do that.

Referring to Trump's statement after the Supreme Court decision that the Indo-US trade agreement still holds, Ramesh asserted that the Modi must say in clear and unambiguous terms that the 'Framework of Interim Agreement' cannot be implemented under current circumstances in view of the US Supreme Court's decision.

Noting that the US SC decision was very important, he said, the agreement must be kept on hold, as under current circumstances there is no clarity. "We demand that import reforms be stayed to protect and safeguard the livelihood of lakhs of farmers across the country." TNN

Trump can impose duties sans Cong nod

▸ Continued from page 1

He cited balance of payments challenges to levy a flat 10% levy on all countries — including those with whom trade deals had been finalised — for 150 days. Hours later, he said on his Truth Social platform that the administration was hiking the import levies "to the fully allowed, and legally tested, 15% level", doubling down on his promise to maintain his aggressive tariff policy.

On Friday, Trump had also announced his intent to use Section 301 to launch investigations against countries. Although Trump did not name any countries, US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer said his office will launch several new investigations, covering most major trading partners.

The move suggested that countries will have to negotiate tariff rates even going forward; perhaps one of the reasons govt refrained from articulating any relief it may have felt over the reduced US tariff. With the revised global tariffs, Trump will use bilateral deals to drive his trade agenda.

On Feb 2, India and the US announced the finalisation of a trade deal, which will result in reciprocal tariffs dropping to 18% from 50%, which included the now dropped 25% penalty for purchase of Russian crude by Indian refiners. On Friday, Trump said that the deal is on, and his officials reiterated the same.

"Our partners have been responsive and engaged in good-faith negotiations and agreements despite the pending litigation, and we are confident that all trade agreements negotiated by President Trump will remain in effect," Reuters said quoting Greer. The probes, which are likely to be accelerated, may cover areas ranging from industrial excess capacity and forced labour to drug pricing and discrimination against US tech companies and digital goods. Other focus areas could be digital services taxes, ocean pollution and trade practices relating to seafood, rice and other items, Greer added.

Seven action pillars to power global AI action

▸ Continued from page 1

The declaration is organised around seven action pillars, or chakras, covering democratising AI resources; economic growth and social good; secure and trusted AI; AI for science; access for social empowerment; human capital development; and resilient, efficient and innovative AI systems. Together, they aim to translate broad principles into coordinated global action.

Several voluntary commitments were announced to support this effort. Among them is the Global AI Impact Commons, described as "a practical platform to encourage and enable the adoption, replication, and scale-up of successful AI use cases across regions".

The idea is to allow countries to share proven applications in areas such as public services, development and governance, reducing duplication and accelerating impact.

Patrolling stepped up in key areas

▸ Continued from page 1

Deployment of forces has been increased to strengthen surveillance and prevent any untoward incidents. Security forces have stepped up patrolling in key areas where religious and historical sites are located. Paramilitary forces have been deployed in large numbers to maintain continuous surveillance, particularly focusing on temple premises, to deter any potential threat.

Vehicles entering Delhi are being inspected, and parked vehicles are also being carefully checked. At the same time, security personnel are continuously monitoring real-time CCTV feeds across the city.

Patenting can never be just an academic exercise: Experts

▸ Continued from page 1

Others are little better, leading an expert from Ambattur, Tamil Nadu, who analysed the data, to wonder, "Are patents being filed as innovation assets or as metrics for rankings and visibility?" Galgotias University, which exhibited a Chinese dogbot at the India AI Impact summit, published 3,333 patents over five years but secured two grants.

A sharper focus on 2020-2023 outcomes (as it takes an average two years to grant a patent under the expedited route) shows even wider disparity. The IITs presented 3,331 patent publications and got 2,118 patents, pushing the success rate to 64%. The IISc successfully converted 257 of its 379 applications in 2020-2023, an approval rate of nearly 68%. For Lovely Professional University, the picture was barely any better in that period: 5,774 publications, 164 grants, and a success rate of a mere 2.8%. Chandigarh University shows a sharper skew—5,318 filings since 2020, only 45 grants overall. In 2023, it published 2,350 patents and received 44, a success rate of 1.87%.

The National Institutes of Technology collectively published 2,333 patent applications in 2020-2025 and secured 949 grants, a success rate of 41%. In 2020-2023, 933 of NITs' patent publications yielded 626 grants, a success rate of 67.1%, comparable to India's top public research universities.

For serious innovation, according to education experts, patenting can never be just an academic exercise as it requires sustained financial investment in labs, hiring of researchers and legal support to achieve successful conversion and technology transfer.

Currently, several privately-run institutions appear to be filing for patents on an industrial scale but have almost nothing to show on conversion. Galgotias University had filed 1,732 applications in 2020-2023 and received none. Shobhit Institute of Engineering and Technology has a similar story: 961 filings, zero approvals—both cumulatively and in 2020-2023.

Modi: Valte's interventions in assembly were insightful

▸ Continued from page 1

Valte remained wheelchair-bound during his treatment. His driver, Thangjoulal, died two days after the attack. Valte's security team was outnumbered and three vehicles were torched.

Valte had returned to Churachandpur in recent times after multiple surgeries and recuperation in Delhi. On Feb 8, he was flown back to Delhi after his condition worsened due to lung complications. He was admitted to Gurugram's Medanta Hospital, where he died on Saturday afternoon. Valte is survived by his wife Lalneihmawi, two sons and a daughter.

PM Narendra Modi paid rich tributes. "Vungzagin Valte will be remembered for his outstanding service to the people of Manipur. He worked diligently towards bringing a positive difference in society. His interventions in the assembly were always insightful. Pained by his passing. Condolences to his family, friends and supporters," Modi wrote on X.

Chief minister Y Khemchand Singh expressed "profound sadness" and the BJP govt declared a three-day state mourning beginning Sunday. "Pu Valte was not only a dedicated public representative but also a compassionate leader who devoted his entire life to the service of the people. His unwavering commitment to the welfare, progress, and holistic development of Manipur reflected his true spirit of selfless service," Khemchand wrote on X.

Throughout his recovery, Valte's statements alternated between calls for a united Manipur and demands for greater autonomy for the Kuki-Zo-mi-Hmar people amid continuing ethnic tensions.

Valte, a former banker and as a research investigator in the state planning department, was first elected Thanlon MLA in 2012 as a Congress candidate. He later switched to BJP and was re-elected in 2017 and 2022. In 2020, he was inducted as a minister in BJP's first govt in Manipur led by Biren Singh. (AGENCY INPUTS)

Activist groups seek accountability and clear policies

▸ Continued from page 1

"We have data of the commuters from whom toll was collected even after orders were issued to suspend it following the gas tanker mishap," the MSRDC official said.

Last week, MSRDC had assured it would return the toll money and sought detailed FASTag deduction data from its concessionaire, IRB Infrastructure, after toll collection was halted in view of the jam. "It is believed that till the barriers were opened, there might have been transactions where funds were deducted from FASTag. We had sought data on the number of commuters whose money was deducted after the order was issued to suspend the toll collection. Those amounts will be refunded," the official said.

The Feb 3 mishap resulted in severe congestion, leaving thousands of commuters stranded on the expressway without basic amenities. Travellers, including senior citizens, women and children, faced significant hardships, with many forced to cancel plans.

Public anger grew when reports emerged that toll collection persisted at the Khalapur plaza for some time. Opposition politicians, including MNS chief Raj Thackeray, had demanded that MSRDC, IRB and the traffic police ensure refunds to the affected commuters.

Activist groups Akhil Bharatiya Grahak Panchayat and All India Consumer Rights Organisation have issued legal notices to MSRDC and disaster management officials seeking accountability and the creation of clear policies to prevent such incidents across highways.

3 teachers, peon held for raping minor

Kendrapada: Three teachers and a peon of a private English medium school in Odisha's Kendrapada district were arrested on Saturday for allegedly raping a 12-year-old class 7 student multiple times over the past two years. A woman teacher was also taken into custody for abetting and concealing the crime. Police lodged an FIR Saturday after the survivor's father filed a complaint. TNN

Uttar Pradesh University of Medical Sciences,
Saifai, Etawah,
Email :-[illegible]@upums.ac.in, upumsmm.medicine@gmail.com

Ref No.: [illegible]/UPUMS/2026-CD/Med-Ten/25-26 Date: 13 Feb 2026

e-Tender Notice

E-bids are invited in Two Bid System (1) **Technical Bid** and (2) **Price Bid** from Reputed & Genuine manufacturers/Third Party Manufacturer/Direct Importers/Authorized/Distributors, for executing a rate contract of supply of Medicine & disinfectants for a period of Two Year against tender No. [illegible]

The detailed terms and conditions such as Tender Fees, EMD and MAF are available in the e-Bid document uploaded on e-tender portal [illegible] and website of the University www.upums.ac.in w.e.f. 23 Feb 2026. The offer will be accepted online only on e-tender portal with terms & conditions as mentioned in tender document.

Publishing Date & Time	23 Feb 2026 12:00 Hrs
Bid Submission Start Date	23 Feb 2026 12:00 Hrs
Last date & time of submission of e-bid	11 Mar 2026 up to 17:00 HRS
Date & Time for opening of e-bid	17 Mar 2026 at 11:00 HRS

The Vice-Chancellor reserves the right to accept or reject any offer partially or fully without assigning any reason.

Incharge Procurement Medicine

25001/216/2026

By E_Mail/e-Despatch
E_Mail ID: [illegible]
[illegible]

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER RURAL WORKS CIRCLE, BARIPADA

Office Order No 1153/Dt 20.02.2026

1st Corrigendum to National Competitive Bidding e_procurement Notice No.743/Bridge works Dt.29.01.2026 (NCB No-405).

Due to unavoidable circumstances the important dates of tendering process for bridge works SI No-1, No-2 and SI No-3 are being changed as follows.

Sl No	Item	Time Schedule as per Original NCB	Time Schedule as per Corrigendum Notice
1	Availability of tender On-line for bidding	13.02.2026 at 11.00 A.M to 27.02.2026 up to 05.00 PM	27.02.2026 at 11.00 A.M to 13.03.2026 up to 05.00 PM
2	Date & Time of Seeking Tender Clarification if any	28.02.2026 up to 05.00 PM	13.03.2026 up to 05.00 PM
3	Date & Time of Opening of Technical Bid	02.03.2026 at 11.00 A.M	16.03.2026 at 11.00 A.M
4	Date & Time of Opening of Financial Bid	Will be intimated later	Will be intimated later

All other terms and conditions remain unchanged.

Sd/-
Er. A.K Naik
Chief Construction Engineer
R.W. CIRCLE, BARIPADA
[illegible]

AGRICULTURE PRODUCE MARKET COMMITTEE VIJAYAPUR

No:Amd:APMC(V)/Dev/1621/2025-26 Date 20.02.2026

E-TENDER NOTIFICATION

1) **Name of Work: CONSTRUCTION OF 80MT ELECTRONIC WEIGH BRIDGE AT KOLAR TOWN OF APMC VIJAYAPUR. INDENT NO:- APMC/2025-26/OW/WORK_INDENT846 Amount put to Tender Rs. 51,32,917=00 (Excluding GST). E.M.D. Amount Rs.1,02,660=00**

TENDER HAS BEEN CALLED THROUGH KPP PORTAL TO EXECUTE THE ABOVE WORK. PRE-BID MEETING AND TENDER DISPUTE RESOLUTION DATE: 06-03-2026 AT 11.30 AM VENUE: ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE MAIN MARKET YARD, VIJAYAPUR. LAST DATE & TIME FOR SUBMISSION OF TENDER IS 11-03-2026 UP TO 5.30 PM. FOR FURTHER DETAILS CONTACT DURING OFFICE HOURS AND VISIT THE WEBSITE https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in

Sd/- Secretary APMC Vijayapur [illegible] Sd/- Administrator APMC Vijayapur

KERALA MEDICAL SERVICES CORPORATION LTD
(DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE, GOVT. OF KERALA)
Head Office : Thycaud, Thiruvananthapuram-14,
(Telephone No. 0471-2945993, 2945046)
E-mail : edrugs.kmscl@kerala.gov.in,
website : www.kmscl.kerala.gov.in, CIN No. U24233KL2007SGC021616

No.KMSCL/ED/03/2026 Date : 20.02.2026

E-TENDER NOTICE

Online bids are invited from manufacturers/loan licensees on behalf of Department of Health, Govt of Kerala for the procurement of Bleaching Powder for the year 2026-27.

Sl. No.	Tender No. and Date	Category	No. of Items
1.	KMSCL/ED/Bleaching Powder/RC/2026/003 dtd: 20.02.2026	Disinfectant and Chemicals	1

Schedule of dates

	Date	Time
Last date of online uploading of tenders	06.03.2026	05.00 pm. onwards
Date of technical bid opening	09.03.2026	11.00 am. onwards

Tenders shall be downloaded and submitted online through the e-tender portal www.etenders.kerala.gov.in

(Sd/-) MANAGING DIRECTOR (Tender Inviting Authority)

SOUTH WESTERN RAILWAY

Tender Notice No. [illegible] Dated : 18-02-2026

The undersigned, on behalf of the President of India, invites E-Tenders for the following works.

Name of the Work	Approx. Value
Implementation of Safety and Reliability Action plan for safety of Traction distribution assets at Stations, Platforms, FOBs, ROBs and LC gates.	Rs. 1,28,48,855/-

Last date for submission of bids: Upto 11.00 Hrs on 17-03-2026

For details log on: www.ireps.gov.in [illegible]

Senior Divisional Electrical Engineer/ Traction Distribution/Hubballi

Download the RailOne app. RailOne is the all-in-one railway app by Indian Railways. Passengers can book reserved tickets, unreserved tickets, platform tickets, and season passes, check PNR status, order food, and access many more services at their fingertips. Use digital payment to book unreserved tickets through RailOne app, and enjoy up to a 3% discount.

ಜಿಲ್ಲಾ ಪಂಚಾಯತ್ ಧಾರವಾಡ
[illegible]
[illegible] - 580001.
[illegible]: 0836-2442316 [illegible]: zpdddwd@rediffmail.com

[illegible]-2/2025-26/4796 [illegible]: 20-02-2026

[illegible]-41/2025-26 [illegible]

[illegible] No.FD 876 Exp-12/2017, Bengaluru, Dated: 15-09-2017 [illegible] KW-2 & 3 [illegible] 2000 [illegible] https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in [illegible]

Indent Numbers:
General : 24428, 24618, 24859

[illegible]: 1) [illegible] 23-02-2026 [illegible] 03-03-2026 [illegible] 4.00 [illegible] 2) [illegible] 04-03-2026 [illegible] 4.30 [illegible] 3) [illegible] 09-03-2026 [illegible] 11.00 [illegible]

[illegible] https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in [illegible]

[illegible]

OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT SURGEON, SNR DISTRICT HOSPITAL, KOLAR

Phone No.08152-222050/36, Email.dskolar@gmail.com

NO: SNR/Gr D/Outsource/22/2025-26 Date:19.02.2026

E-TENDER INVITATION

Bids are hereby invited for the supply of Diet articles, Drugs/ Surgical consumables and human resource on outsource basis to SNR dist. hospital, Kolar. Details of tender terms and conditions are available on e-procurement portal http:// **kppp.karnataka.gov.in**. Tendering authority reserves the right to cancel any or all e-bids without assigning any reasons. bidders are advised to visit the website regularly for updated information from time to time. (1) Supply of Diet articles IFT No: SNR /diet/01/25-26, Dt: 19.02.2026, Estimated Cost Rs. 78,35,075/- EMD :1,95,876/- , **Last date for submission 20.03.2026, 05:00 PM.** (2) Supply of human resource IFT No: SNR/Gr-D/Outsource/22/2025-26,Dt: 19.02.2026, Estimated Cost Rs. 2,18,30,117/-, EMD 5,46,000/-, **Last date for submission Dt: 20.03.2026, 5:00 PM.** (3) Supply of human resource IFT No: SNR/NON CLINICAL/23/2025-26, Dt: 19.02.2026, Estimated Cost Rs. 1,87,60,417/-, EMD 4,69,010/-, **Last date for submission Dt: 20.03.2026, 5:00 PM,** (4) Supply of drugs/surgical consumables IFT No: SNR/SUP/RC/[illegible]/2025-26 (Call-2) Dt: 19.02.2026, Estimated Cost Rs. 50,00,000/-, EMD: 1,00,000/- , **Last date for submission Dt: 20.03.2026, 5:00 PM.**

Sd/- DISTRICT SURGEON SNR DISTRICT HOSPITAL, KOLAR

DIPR/KOL/[illegible]/2025-26

MADHYA PRADESH RURAL ROAD DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
(An Agency of Panchayat & Rural Development Department, Govt. of M.P.)
3rd Floor, Vikas Bhawan, Arera Hills, Bhopal (M.P.)
(GST No. 23AAATM[illegible]A1ZX)

No. 1769/22/D-12/Brg.DPR/2026 Bhopal, Dated : 21.02.2026

DPR CONSULTANCY OF BRIDGES
(Short Time E-Procurement Notice)

Online Bids are invited from the reputed Consultants for preparation of DPR of Bridge under PMGSY-III as per details given below:-

- **No. of Packages - 62**
- **Nodal PIU** - Betul-1, Harda, Raisen, Guna, Sheopur, Shivpuri, Alirajpur, Barwani, Burhanpur, Dhar-1, Indore, Jhabua, Khandwa, Khargone, Seoni, Chhindwara, Dindori, Pandhurna, Satna, Waidhan, Panna, Damoh, Sagar-1, Dewas & Ratlam.
- **No. of Bridges** - 783

Total Estimated Construction Cost (in Rs.) – Rs. 14912236680.00

- **Cost of Bid Document, Bid Security (EMD) and service charges as appearing on e-procurement portal are to be paid simultaneously through Debit Card/Credit Card/Internet Banking or system generated challan. For detailed procedure of online payment of EMD and submission of affidavit please refer condition number 2 of detailed NIT.**

1. RFP document may be seen, downloaded and purchased from our e-procurement website **https://mptenders.gov.in from 11:30 hrs. on 25.02.2026.**
2. Last date of Submission of bid is date **23.03.2026 upto 13.00 hrs.** Other details & Conditions may be seen in the detailed NIT and Tender Document for preparation of DPR of Bridges under PMGSY February-2026 amended up to date on our Website **http://mptenders.gov.in.**

M.P. Madhyam/124582/2026 CHIEF GENERAL MANAGER (TENDER)

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SOUTH WESTERN RAILWAY
PUBLIC NOTICE

After completion of Double line works in Makkajipalli-Dharmavaram (Satya Sai District of Andhra Pradesh) section of Penukonda-Dharmavaram BG line route, as part of statutory inspection by Commissioner of Railway Safety, Southern Circle, a speed trial by Special Train will be conducted in the same section on **23.02.2026**, and during the speed trial, trains will run at a speed in excess of **130 km/h** on the newly laid double line and subsequently regular train services will be introduced on this Railway line. Public are hereby advised to be cautious and not to trespass the Railway line, which will endanger the lives. Trespassers are also liable for prosecution, which may please be noted.

Chief Engineer/Construction/II Bengaluru Cantonment

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A child after death? Families cling to hope, and frozen sperm

Grieving parents and siblings are moving court to access frozen sperm of the loved ones they have lost, testing the limits of India's ART and surrogacy laws

Himanshi.Dhawan@timesofindia.com

Standing alone outside court room number 49, Heena Pawar watches the electronic counter intently. Her case is listed at number 12, and the court has just begun to rustle with activity. She settles in for another long wait. For a year now, she has stood vigil at the Delhi high court, hoping to be heard.

Pawar knows she is testing the limits of legal jurisprudence in India. Her plea? To gain access to her dead brother's frozen sperm and use assisted reproductive technology (ART) to have a baby through a surrogate. The process, known as posthumous reproduction, involves using a deceased person's gametes or embryos to conceive through fertility treatment. After a man dies, his sperm lives for up to 72 hours, according to experts.

Supreme Court lawyer and doctor Sunil Khattri says India has no specific law on posthumous reproduction. Two laws for those unable to conceive naturally — the Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Act, 2021, and the Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021 — regulate clinics and patient safety, and require explicit consent on what happens to gametes or embryos after one or both partners die.

In practice, this applies to the 'commissioning couple' defined under the Acts and most fertility clinics require couples to sign contracts detailing their wishes. If a clear agreement exists, courts usually uphold it.

In the last two years, grandparents, parents and close kin like Pawar have been knocking on court doors, seeking life after death.

In Pawar's case, the court issued an emergency order allowing sperm retrieval after her brother's sudden death. Raja Choudhary, Pawar's lawyer, says, "Her 29-year-old brother Sumit died by suicide on Jan 22 last year. The court approved sperm retrieval within 24 hours of his death."

For Pawar, even amid the tragedy, this allowed a ray of hope. "I want to give my parents something to live for. They keep telling me I'm wasting my life on this futile exercise. But I can't give up without trying," she says.

Gurvinder Singh and his wife Harbir Kaur are fighting a similar battle. Their son, Preet Inder Singh, died in Sept 2020 after battling non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. During treatment, doctors at Gangaram Hospital advised the bachelor to cryopreserve his semen as chemotherapy could affect fertility. Preet Inder did so three months before he passed.

After his death, the hospital refused the parents access to the frozen sperm, calling it illegal. Four years later, Delhi HC ruled that they were the primary heirs to their son's bodily assets and directed the hospital to hand over his semen sample.

Heena Pawar is fighting for a baby with her deceased brother Sumit's sperm

The ruling recognised the parents' wish to preserve their son's legacy.

The court was also persuaded because Preet Inder had frozen his sperm before the ART and surrogacy laws came into force in 2021. Despite the court's permission, no fertility clinic was willing to conduct the IVF procedure. The grieving couple approached the court again, citing contempt of its orders. But instead, a new hurdle has arisen. The Delhi HC order was challenged by the Centre earlier this year. The case is back in court, and the parents' wait continues.

In Dec last year, the Centre similarly challenged a woman's petition in the Bombay HC seeking transfer of her late son's sperm for IVF, arguing that he had signed a consent form directing the sample be destroyed in the event of his death.

There has been only one successful case of 'posthumous grandparenthood' in India, in 2018, before the ART and surrogacy laws came into force. Prathamesh Patil was studying in Germany when he was diagnosed with a brain tumour in 2013. During chemotherapy, he preserved his sperm on medical advice. He died in Pune in 2016, and the family was later informed by the German hospital about the frozen sample.

Dr Supriya Puranik, an IVF specialist, recalls the unusual request. "I could see that the family, especially the mother, was very disturbed. But there was no law against it and we went ahead," she says.

Today, 57-year-old Rajashree Patil is 'mummy' to seven-year-old twins Prathamesh and Preesha. "Their interests change every day. One day it's skating, the next day it's badminton. Recently, Prathamesh scored 96% in class two," she says proudly.

Patil's voice turns sombre as she speaks of her son. "*Apne kaleje ka tukda tha* (he was my everything). But when I look at these two, I feel like he's still with me. The twins helped me and our family overcome our grief," she says.

Dr Puranik says that although the procedure went off without a hitch, there was backlash over the legal and moral implications. "There were concerns on whether the couple would be healthy enough to take care of the children," she adds.

Pawar too recognises the sensitivity of a sister seeking to have a brother's baby. "I have been warned that there may be questions about my intentions, but I am only thinking of my parents' happiness," she says.

Her case is even more unusual because postmortem sperm retrieval (PMSR) has not been done in India before. An ICMR-funded research study at AIIMS Bhopal found sperm viability of up to 50% within 21 hours of death due to mechanical asphyxia. "While this practice exists in the UK, parts of the US and Australia, India has not yet created legal protocols or an ethical framework for this," says Dr Raghvendra Vidua, professor in the department of forensic medicine and toxicology.

Meanwhile, Pawar, who is pursuing a PhD at Delhi University, says the legal battle has given her life fresh meaning. She remembers Sumit as a caring goofball who volunteered to help sick neighbours during Covid and looked after their ailing parents. "My mother has chronic kidney disease, so she must follow a strict diet. Whenever she'd break it, he would rat her out by making videos and sending them to me," she says.

A school dropout, Sumit often struggled with depression over not doing enough to help with the family's finances. Jan 22 was one such day. "My uncle fell ill and we all rushed him to hospital. While I was there, my mother called to tell me that he had died," Pawar says.

She says she had once read about a case of postmortem sperm retrieval in a newspaper, and when her brother died, "it came back to me". Her family dismissed the idea and the hospital refused, telling her it would only be possible with a court order. As preparations for cremation began, she "had to fight" to have the body sent back to the morgue while she moved court.

Lawyer Khattri says courts must address four concerns arising from such cases: If reproductive material can be inherited or used by legal heirs; whether the current ART and surrogacy laws permit use of gametes and embryos posthumously; the role of consent, particularly if the deceased are unmarried or did not explicitly state their posthumous intentions; and the status of the child conceived posthumously and questions on parentage, legal recognition and inheritance.

Reflecting on her year-long struggle, Pawar says, "My parents want me to move on, get married, have my own family. But when I ask them if my child will give you the same happiness as Sumit's child, they remain silent. That answers my question." In one of their last conversations, Sumit talked about having a family and taking care of his children. "I want to fulfil his last wishes," she says. Her case is now postponed till March 7. The wait continues.

In 2018, before India's ART and surrogacy laws came into force, the country saw its only case of 'posthumous grandparenthood'. Today, 57-yr-old Rajashree Patil, whose son's sperm was frozen before he died of cancer, is 'mummy' to seven-year-old twins Prathamesh and Preesha. "Their interests change every day. One day it's skating, the next day it's badminton," she says

WHAT THE LAWS SAY AROUND THE WORLD

- Allowed in Czech Republic, UK, Japan
- Allowed with certain conditions in Australia, US, Israel
- Countries where it is banned include Germany, Slovenia, Hungary

LANDMARK CASES

US: In 2019, a New York judge lets parents retrieve sperm after their son, military cadet Peter Zhu, died in a skiing accident

UK: In 2022, court allowed a widower to use the last remaining IVF embryo he created with his deceased wife

Israel: After the Oct 7, 2023 Hamas attack, postmortem sperm retrieval was performed on around 250 soldiers, most of them on request of parents. A decision is still pending on whether these can be used for conception

How 'AI slop' went from viral nonsense to billion-view jackpot

Behind muscular monkeys & sari-clad cat wives are faceless creators from small-town India using generative tools and surreal storylines for reach

VIRAL TREND: 'Bandar Apna Dost', run by Assam's Surajit Karmakar, is the world's most viewed AI slop channel, with 2.1 billion views

Shruti.Sonal@timesofindia.com

A rather muscular monkey, dressed in a red t-shirt and a red and white chequered gamcha, is taking the internet by storm. In one viral video, he boards an aeroplane for the first time in his life. In another instance, he breaks traffic rules while riding a bike and receives a heavy challan. He has a girlfriend too, and flaunts links to vidhayaks on earth and extraterrestrial beings in the sky.

The monkey is not real, it's entirely AI-generated. But the millions of subscribers and views that the YouTube channel 'Bandar Apna Dost' is raking in are very much real. A recent survey by video editing platform Kapwing suggests it is now the world's most-viewed 'AI slop' channel, earning approximately Rs 38 crore a year from YouTube ads.

Behind the bizarre characters and storylines is Surajit Karmakar, a soft-spoken 21-year-old from Assam's Bongaigaon district, who runs the channel with his friend Gaurav. "I started the channel only six months ago, and used to edit the videos on an old Android phone," says Karmakar. Within ten days, his monkey-verse had gained one lakh subscribers. Today, it is nearly three million.

A recent report showed that 21-33% of YouTube's feed consists of AI slop channels. In India, this is a goldmine for camera-shy creators with a strong visual and storytelling sense

Karmakar — represented by an influencer agency and bound by a non-disclosure agreement that prevents him from revealing his earnings — is one of the many 'faceless' influencers in India now going viral using generative AI. This world is populated by outlandish vlogs of ripped monkeys, human-like cats and cartoonish avatars, often with no spoken language but plenty of trending music and dramatic hooks. According to the Kapwing report, which analysed 15,000 of the world's most popular YouTube channels, 278 consist entirely of AI slop, and collectively clocked over 63 billion views and 221 million subscribers.

So what exactly is AI slop, and how is it different from the rest of the junk on your feed? AI slop is typically faceless content, where AI-generated characters and visuals replace the creator on screen. Brain rot, by contrast, is usually people speaking, reacting or performing on camera even while the content itself is nonsensical. Most AI slop fits within the brain-rot universe, but not all brain rot relies on AI.

In India, these tools have given confidence and visibility to a new set of creators who were hesitant about putting themselves online, says Himanshu Singla, co-founder of Idiotic Media, the influencer marketing agency that represents Karmakar and plans to onboard more AI creators in the coming months.

"This shows that many Indians are camera-shy but highly creative. With AI, they can now create content that goes viral on the strength of visuals and storytelling," he says.

Like Karmakar, many such creators come from tier-two and tier-three cities. In Rajasthan's Sri Ganganagar district, postgrad chemistry student Khushdeep Singh uses AI in his spare time to take viewers "back to the past". One viral Instagram reel shows his AI avatar racing to save ancient texts of Nalanda University from burning.

"I was always interested in making religious and historical content. But in movies and shows, they were always from a third person's perspective. I wanted to tell them first hand, but didn't have the tools to do so," says Singh. Last year, he discovered AI video tools. Today, he has nearly 500,000 followers on Instagram, with most reels crossing a million views.

Religious and mythological content also drives Motihari-based AI artist Akshay D, who has one million followers and calls himself a "timeless vlogger". From deep-sea dives to discover relics of Dwarka to witnessing Draupadi's public disrobing, his reels have found a loyal audience.

Singh says the floodgate of AI vloggers is now opening up. "There used to be many boundaries earlier. Even if I had a great idea or a script, I would have had to hire an editor or learn different software... now I can let my creativity run free," he says.

But it's not as easy as it looks. "Even though the final reel is only a minute long, I need to play around with prompts and generate almost 300 scenes. I take the best bit from each scene and stitch them together. One reel can take nearly 12 days to perfect," he says. While the storylines may be bizarre, audiences prefer content around trending topics, festivals and multi-part series.

While early movers are being rewarded, curiosity is growing among many others. Karmakar says his DMs are flooded with queries from aspiring creators about tools and prompts. Singh has also begun offering online classes and already logged 1,600 registrations.

Image: AI

AI generated cats with human-like features and plots are a huge hit

Beyond the worlds of mythology, the 'slop' part in 'AI slop' dominates the internet. Some of the reels the Instagram algorithm threw up to this reporter included a sari-clad cat wife trying to save her kitten from an earthquake and a dog with six-pack abs cheating on his robotic wife, and a baby monkey being bullied for eating maggi in his school. She admits that all the videos were watched till the last second.

But Singla says it's important not to dismiss these videos as "slop". "People take these AI videos as very light-hearted right now, but they have more scope than just brain-rot content," he says. More than anything, AI has given creators scale. "Algorithms reward those who churn out content faster and more regularly. AI has made this possible without help of big teams," he adds.

Meanwhile, Karmakar's monkey-verse is only getting bigger. "I've already created 54 more characters, and plotted their spin-offs," he says enthusiastically. Marvel Studios might recognise his playbook.

HAPPY HOUR, BUT MAKE IT DAWN

Morning raves are swapping booze for brews, giving early risers and fitness fans a healthier way to party without late nights or hangovers

Shruti.Sonal@timesofindia.com

Not too long ago, raves belonged to night owls and party animals, evoking images of dingy nightclubs, sweaty crowds and alcohol-fuelled revelry. That is no longer the case.

On social media reels and in the real world, 'morning raves' are redefining the idea of happy hour. These sober soirees usually begin between 6 and 9 am and wrap up just in time for work, school runs or a yoga class. Cocktails are replaced by matcha, kombucha and coffee, and greasy finger food by breakfast staples like the good ol' muesli bowl. The music, however, is full-throttle: techno, house, Afrobeat or pop remixes delivered by serious DJs who treat early hours with the same reverence as a nightclub set.

From Bengaluru to Indore, several run clubs are now hosting raves as post-run after-parties, where fitness enthusiasts cool down but keep the adrenaline going. Riding the sober-partying wave popular among Gen Z, these events offer flavoured water, fresh juices and energy drinks instead of alcohol.

In Mumbai, integrative health coach Prarthana Shah tapped into the buzz by hosting a 'coffee vs matcha rave', where the two beverages competed for attention alongside beats spun by a DJ. People dropped by all morning, some as a pit stop on their morning walks, others simply to dance. "The idea was to do fun things around health and wellness without it being serious. Conversations around wellness or health tend to be intimidating for a lot of people," she says.

DANCING SHOES ON: Fitness communities such as Bengaluru's Stride Run Club (in pic) and Bhag Club regularly conduct raves after their run sessions

Sanchit Tandon, 25, who has attended a few such events in Noida, says the raves are an added incentive to get up early on a weekend. "I used to feel too lazy to go running by myself, but these events have changed that. I get to have fun and meet people while burning calories," he says. To cater to people like Tandon, a number of fitness communities such as Stride Run Club, Delhi Run Collective and Bhag Club regularly conduct after-run raves on weekends, often tying up with athleisure and energy drink brands eager to tap into the trend.

These morning experiments have also extended to sauna raves. In July last year, an invite-only event in Bengaluru's Brookfield combined a hot yoga session with a rave, tagged 'where sweat meets soul'. Another recent event in the city took the format further, hosting a rave inside a gym, where an intense workout was followed by a DJ blasting music, with protein shakes, sauna sessions and ice plunges rounding it off.

> Conversations around wellness or health tend to be intimidating for a lot of people. The idea behind such events is to do fun things around it without turning it into something too serious
>
> **Prarthana Shah,** MUMBAI-BASED FITNESS COACH

But fitness isn't the only draw. Many opt for morning raves because night outings are difficult, simply because they do not get permission to step out at night or due to demanding work schedules. For Deepti Nair, a 30-year-old marketing consultant who works mostly with US-based clients, the trend has been a relief. "My work emails start trickling in at night just when my friends are stepping out. I missed out on so many plans," she says.

Such 'raves' have also become a marketing buzzword to attract new audiences to niche and experimental events. In Chennai, a car-and-cocoa rave held inside an amusement park on a Sunday morning in Jan saw almost 400 people turning up.

"It was raining at the beginning of the event, so it was gloomy. But once the rain stopped, everyone grooved to the music and geeked out over cars," says Suriyah, co-founder of Madras Driven, a community of car lovers. The organisers partnered with F&B outlets for serving energy drinks and breakfast, and also set up stalls selling car toys and collectables. "In our usual events, it's mostly car owners in their 30s and 40s. This rave attracted mostly college-goers, and helped us reach a Gen Z audience," Suriyah points out.

If cafe owners and community managers are relishing this opportunity, so are DJs. "Electronic music is no longer confined to nightclubs. It can be played in someone's backyard, at a coffee place or a pizza joint," says Gurugram-based DJ Kount, adding, "morning raves allow for smaller, more intimate setups where DJs can experiment with styles and play to audiences that genuinely come for the music."

No matter where these morning raves happen or what's on the playlist, one thing is becoming clear: Young people are just looking for new ways to gather, feel good and still make it through the day

Dhaka verdict: Let's temper the euphoria

RIGHT & WRONG

SWAPAN DASGUPTA

OLD FOES: BNP needs the Awami League to prevent the country's journey down the slippery slope of Islamism

It is understandable that the outcome of the Feb 12 election in Bangladesh has been greeted with a sigh of relief in India. However, viewed from the perspective of democratic rectitude, the electoral exercise left much to be desired. Reports indicate that the turnout of over 60%, as stated by the country's Election Commission, was highly inflated. The reasons behind the lukewarm turnout of actual voters—as opposed to the ballots that were counted—will remain a subject of debate, but in any other wise normal democracy the legitimacy of the election that saw the Bangladesh Nationalist Party secure an emphatic mandate would have been questioned.

There are reasons why these irregularities have been conveniently glossed over by both the Bangladesh establishment and the international community. First, its track record of electoral management has never been exemplary, and the country appears to have reconciled itself to variants of guided democracy. This election was no exception. There is now hope that Bangladesh will earn a respite from two years of turmoil, uncertainty and mob rule and revert to a more predictable existence. Until the next fire.

Second, while there is no uniform pattern to the electoral mishaps, a last-minute intervention by the military prevented a victory of Islamist candidates in some urban areas, including Dhaka. The defeat of the firebrand Mamunul Haque, the amir of the Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, from a Dhaka constituency was, for example, quite inexplicable. A combination of low general turnout plus disciplined mobilisation of supporters by the Jamaat-e-Islami may explain why Bangladesh's democracy needed a high degree of Cantonment guidance. The lofty objective of preventing the emergence of a Razakar Republic may also explain why some 35% votes (the estimate of Transparency International Bangladesh) had to be cast by "invisible voters". Thanks to these political improvisations, Bangladesh was rescued from the uncertainties of a fractured Parliament held hostage to forces that were intent on negating the legacy of the 1971 liberation from Pakistan. No wonder India greeted the election of Tarique Rahman with such alacrity and warmth.

For the moment and regardless of the dodginess of the democratic restoration, the conduct of the new PM has been exemplary. He has scrupulously stroke the notion through a policy of social and religious inclusiveness—an approach that should reduce the tensions of the beleaguered Hindu community—and base his foreign policy on responsible national interest. Tarique is aware that the Yunus regime's reckless anti-India posturing has proved economically damaging to the economy and brought hardships to its people. Consequently, he is likely to do his bit to mend fences, and New Delhi is in a mood to reciprocate.

The elephant in the room is the Awami League, most of whose leaders are in exile. The Awami-BNP rivalry has been an integral feature of Bangladesh politics since 1975, but this was complicated by the ban on the Awami League and its exclusion from the elections. Additionally, the persecution of its supporters was supplemented by the destruction of all the symbols of the liberation war—what Yunus celebrated as the great 'reset'. Yet, as this election again demonstrated, the Awami support base—said to be in the region of 30%—is broadly intact. Unless the party can resume its place in public life, Bangladesh's democracy will become even more flawed.

For the BNP, magnanimity in victory is, however, easier said than done. Awami Leaguers returned to mainstream politics will promptly invite severe retribution from the Jamaat and the ragtag band of students whose threats were responsible for the ban in the first place. A section of the BNP too will be loath to share the Bangla nationalist space with its old adversary. Yet, while grandiose political declarations are relevant, the inexperienced Tarique should remember that unless Awami League is permitted to return to political life and the vengeful cases against its leaders withdrawn, there is every possibility of the Islamist forces securing an upper hand in the coming days. BNP needs the Awami League to prevent Bangladesh's journey down the slippery slope of Islamism.

As of now, the BNP govt has snubbed the forces that wanted to leverage the outcome of a suspect referendum to enact a new Islamic Constitution. The Islamists may have made a tactical retreat for the time being, but it is unlikely the Jamaat and its foreign backers will easily forget that it came within a whisker of capturing Bangladesh. The larger project of avenging the defeat of 1971 will be resumed at the first sign of the BNP govt faltering, and it will be replenished with visceral anti-India activity.

India's national security and its hopes of a stable neighbour will be enhanced if New Delhi links its hand of friendship with some lessons to the new PM in enlightened self-interest. ■

You can't simply say a child shouldn't use AI. This generation is growing up with it

Named among TIME's AI Architects 2025 alongside OpenAI's Sam Altman and Nvidia's Jensen Huang, ***Karandeep Anand*** *is among a new wave of Indian-origin leaders shaping consumer AI. In Delhi for Synapse, a society and technology conference, Anand, the CEO of Character.AI, speaks to* ***Sneha Bhura*** *about why he believes AI could ultimately reduce, not deepen, screen dependence*

FOR THE RECORD

You're visiting India as it wraps up its first major AI summit. As the US and China compete to win the AI race, what's your take on India's ambitions?

It's a fascinating time we are in. There is a mad rush to build the biggest, fastest AI models. It's obvious that every company and every nation sees this as a form of power worth having. That's why India, as a large emerging superpower, cannot afford to be left behind. We might be a little late from an Indian perspective, as it takes time to build the infrastructure, the technology stack, and spend the necessary capital and resources to that end. But from what I understand, the response and attendance at the AI summit were probably larger than anticipated, which is a great sign of excitement and interest.

You stepped into the CEO's chair at a time when Character.AI was under intense scrutiny over child safety and harmful interactions. There were chatbots called Teachers. The company later barred teens from open-ended chatbot conversations. What did that teach you about the deeper responsibilities of creating chatbots?

We inherited a product that was already very successful, but at the same time, we were learning — as you said — that chatbots can be pushed in ways that challenge safety guardrails. Over the last six to seven months, I have spent a lot of time focusing on building AI responsibly. For example, we rolled out age assurances. We want to make sure that if someone says they are 13, they actually are. If you're under 18, you can still watch and create stories with your favourite characters, but you don't have an open-ended chat. We do a lot of work to make sure controversial characters or banned topics are automatically flagged. Users sometimes try to bypass this, like naming a banned person differently. So, we go beyond names and analyse character descriptions and images.

Over the past two and a half years, we've built a sophisticated system to continuously monitor characters, their definitions, names and images.

This isn't just Character.AI doing it. Meta stopped its chatbots for teens, Roblox implemented age assurance and Discord did the same. What I feel really proud of is that we set the bar for what AI safety could look like.

Govts worldwide—including India—are considering age-based restrictions on social media usage. Should AI companion platforms be regulated like social media?

AI can be used to build social media but it can also be used in many other ways — as a math tutor, a language tutor, a roleplay app like ours or for AI-powered reels in Meta. It's the use case that matters. Responsibility for guardrails cannot lie solely with regulators. Tech companies must work with regulators to explain the technology, how it can be misused and what frameworks are needed. Ultimately, it's a combination of three stakeholders: tech companies, regulators and parents.

Parents must also understand how to regulate AI usage for their children.

You recently said in an interview that your six-year-old daughter uses Character.AI. As a parent, how do you put boundaries in place?

Now that Character.AI is less accessible to teens, my daughter doesn't use it as much, but she still interacts with it with me supervising. She also has access to ChatGPT and my Gemini account. It's fascinating to watch someone so young use AI so naturally. That's why you can't simply say "A child shouldn't use AI." This generation is growing up surrounded by AI, and we have to assume that, and build products accordingly. It's a very accessible technology. Previously, when we used computers, we had to type, understand devices, operating systems and browsers. Now, a six-year-old can just speak— in Hindi, Punjabi, English — and the AI responds accordingly. It can also adjust how it speaks to a child, differently from how a human would. That said, whether it's for homework, storytelling or entertainment, I supervise her use. Parents need to watch which apps their kids use. Would I let my daughter use any AI-powered app from the app store? Absolutely not.

In India, are AI companions mainly novelty and entertainment, or are they filling deeper gaps?

We have roughly 30m monthly active users; 30% are outside the US, with India being a very large part of our user base. This shows that the need for AI-powered entertainment and roleplay is universal, whether it is someone in Delhi, Chandigarh or Jaipur or in New York or San Francisco. But what starts as novelty often becomes deeper usage — gaming, companionship etc.

But dependency can be a problem for adults as well. Are there safeguards for that?

Absolutely. Any conversations around violence, self-harm or sexual topics need strict moderation. We allow romantic conversations but not sexual ones. For example, while scenarios of kissing but explicit sexual dialogue is not. You can roleplay fighting zombies or vampires, but not real-world shooting. Without strict moderation, a platform with AI's power shouldn't scale.

What advances excite you the most?

Earlier, chatbots required typing long text messages. Now, voice, natural language and multilingual bots make AI far more accessible. My mother can speak Punjabi to AI. You can even create your own characters. For example, I created a Jugal Bhatti-like character for my parents. There's still work to do in better supporting Indic languages. It's an area where India can lead in innovation. Third, hyper-realistic, high-quality short videos and AI-powered games are emerging. The interesting thing is that AI can decouple people from screens. For the first time, AI allows interaction through voice and background devices, not just on a phone or computer.

Viral robodog video shows why Indian universities need less spin, more substance

BY INVITATION

V RAMGOPAL RAO

The recent episode involving a private university at the AI Impact Summit has been painful to watch.

First, a word for the students and faculty. There are good students and committed teachers in *every* institution. When something goes viral for the wrong reasons, it is not only the management that feels the heat. It is the final year student sitting for placements. It is the young assistant professor building a research profile. Social media can be brutal. The debate quickly escalates into questions of national prestige. That part is deeply unfortunate.

Now to the uncomfortable questions.

What is fundamentally wrong in such incidents is not one exhibition or one poorly handled explanation. It is a culture where optics begin to dominate substance.

A serious academic institution does not send a marketing executive to explain a technical prototype. The person standing next to a demo must be someone who designed it, built it, coded it or experimentally validated it. The moment scripted marketing language replaces technical depth, credibility collapses. In today's world, every audience member can fact-check in real time.

Second, excessive freedom to marketing teams in academic matters is risky. Universities are not branding agencies. Communication must be academically vetted. Leadership must take responsibility. Public claims are not just about visibility. They reflect the intellectual integrity of the institution.

Third, when something goes wrong, own up to the mistake. Issue a clear clarification. Do not attempt to defend it with clever explanations and wordplay. Institutions earn long-term respect through accountability, not spin.

There is also a deeper structural issue that such episodes expose.

An academic institution cannot file an extraordinary numbers of patents without extraordinary investment. Filing, prosecuting and maintaining patents costs serious money. Converting them into granted patents and then into licensed technologies requires labs, researchers, legal support and sustained funding. If financial investments do not align with public claims, the mismatch will eventually surface.

The same applies to policy citations. Quality research is expensive. Equipment, consumables, PhD fellowships, postdoctoral support, conference travel and publication costs all add up. If managements set aggressive numerical targets for papers and patents without matching infrastructure and funding, perverse incentives creep in. Quantity replaces quality. Faculty feel pressured. Students get pushed into superficial outputs. The ecosystem notices. Word travels.

Rankings cannot be used as a shield. Many stakeholders understand how metrics can be gamed. Enduring reputation is built over decades of consistent work, not through sudden spikes in numbers.

There are several institutions in the country walking a similar path. The only difference is that they have not yet faced scrutiny. They should learn from this moment. Build guardrails before you are forced to.

Align claims with capacity. Make research expenditure and outcomes transparent. Ensure that every technical claim is validated by faculty. Stop reducing academic performance to crude numerical targets. Encourage depth and real problem-solving.

If your strength is undergraduate teaching, embrace it. There is nothing inferior about being an excellent teaching-focused institution. Not every university needs to project itself as a top research powerhouse.

Finally, regulators must intervene earlier when visible anomalies appear in patent counts, publication patterns or faculty ratios. Timely correction is far better than public embarrassment.

One genuinely feels for the students and faculty who had no role in strategic decisions but now face the consequences of perception. The way forward is not outrage. It is reform.

Let this be a moment of introspection for all of us. Let us build institutions that are honest about their capabilities, transparent in their claims and ambitious in ways that are backed by real investment.

Reputation is fragile in this age of viral videos. Culture, if corrected in time, can still secure the future. ■

Rao is vice chancellor for BITS Pilani group of institutions and former director of IIT Delhi

Why trade deals can't help India become a major apparel exporter

SWAMINOMICS

SWAMINATHAN S ANKLESARIA AIYAR

India is energetically pursuing Free Trade Agreements (FTAs). It has signed deals with the UK, EFTA, UAE, Oman, and Australia. It has finalised negotiations with the European Union, a really big market, and ratification by EU members should follow next year. A framework agreement with the US has been negotiated. Donald Trump has already said that the Supreme Court verdict striking down duties charges "nothing" for the India-US trade deal. "They'll be paying tariffs, and we will not be paying tariffs." Economists are hopeful that such deals will boost labour-intensive low-cost exports like garments and footwear.

Such euphoria may be unwarranted. The govt was trying to promote textile exports 40 years ago when I became a journalist and is still trying to do so, with very limited success. Bangladesh and Vietnam have garment factories with 50,000 female workers apiece, but our businessmen seek to automate production rather than use labour-intensive methods because labour laws and a plethora of holidays make it unattractive. The country's biggest trade union (BMS) is aligned with the BJP and when the Congress was in office, it also had the biggest union (INTUC) then. While lip service is paid to the need to employ millions, no party dares trim the perks of the labour aristocracy. Hence, India has always failed in low-cost, labour-intensive exports.

An additional threat that too often escapes notice does not come from Brussels, London, or Canberra. It comes from India's own producers of polyester and viscose, who have lobbied successfully for non-tariff barriers that raise fibre prices and hurt global competitiveness in downstream industries like garments. Such measures not only nullify the supposed benefits of zero tariffs but also generate enormous gains for the producers of polyester and viscose.

This has been spelt out in two papers by economists Abhishek Anand and Naveen Joseph Thomas. Their case study of viscose suggests that between 2010 and 2024, non-tariff measures generated $2.5-3.1 billion in additional profits for the main producer. This hit downstream manufacturers, so India's share of global viscose-based exports (such as garments) declined over the same period.

In a separate paper, they found that this was equally true of the polyester industry, where non-tariff measures benefited producers of a vital chemical input into polyester called purified terephthalic acid, but at the expense of garment exporters. Both polyester and viscose production are dominated by industrial giants with powerful political clout, something garment exporters lack.

The main non-tariff barriers are anti-dumping duties and quality control orders, sometimes used in rotation so that cheap imports are virtually never possible. A few months ago, the govt lifted quality control orders on PTA and viscose to cheers from garment exporters. Fears remain that, as in the past, non-tariff barriers will return through anti-dumping duties.

NOT COTTONED ON: The world has shifted to polyester and viscose but non-tariff barriers keep India uncompetitive and anchored to cotton fibre

Cotton, once king, is now the minority fibre worldwide. From China to Vietnam to Bangladesh, textile industries have shifted to polyester and viscose and these man-made fibres now account for nearly 70% of global fibre consumption.

But India remains structurally cotton-heavy because its tariff structure in inputs and outputs of textiles has long been inverted. Duties on polyester's raw materials such as PTA and MEG have typically been much higher than on polyester itself. So, Indian spinners and weavers who produce polyester yarns and fabrics face higher input costs than global competitors. In a global industry where margins are razor-thin, even a 3-5% cost disadvantage can kill exports.

So, while FTAs reduce tariffs on finished garments entering the EU or UK, Indian exporters remain uncompetitive because their raw material costs are too high. India's garment exports have stagnated around the $16-18 billion mark for years. Meanwhile, Bangladesh has surged past $40 billion, and Vietnam is growing the fastest of all. Both import raw materials at globally competitive prices and focus on value addition in garments. They employ millions in labour-intensive apparel, while India trails.

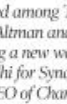
Cotton has a large farmer constituency. The narrative of "protecting domestic industry" resonates more easily with cotton apparel. Yet clinging to cotton dominance is obsolete short-sightedness. Global fashion trends, especially fast fashion, are firmly tilted toward blends, synthetics, and performance fabrics.

India cannot aspire to be a $100-billion textile exporter while staying structurally anchored to cotton. It must eliminate inverted duty structures. Garment makers must get priority over the interests of producers of polyester and viscose.

Free-trade agreements can open doors. But if domestic policy keeps tying knots in the supply chain, those doors will lead nowhere. India must decide whether to protect a few or empower the many. ■

Pannun case: Nikhil Gupta pleads guilty but unanswered questions are piling up

BY INVITATION



ANIRUDHYA MITRA

On June 30, 2023, Nikhil Gupta boarded a flight from India to Prague. The moment he landed, he was arrested at America's request. He was later extradited, and this month, pleaded guilty in New York to conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire. The target was Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, a Sikh separatist who holds US citizenship. The indictment identified a co-conspirator as Vikash Yadav (CC-1), described as an officer of India's external intelligence agency, R&AW.

Those are the facts on the record, and they're serious. But just laying them out isn't analysis. The case needs to be looked at more carefully — at what actually happened, and whether the story we've been told holds together.

Sting operations are a perfectly normal law enforcement tool. Nobody's saying they're not. But here's the thing when a plot this serious — one that implicates a sovereign government — rests almost entirely on evidence gathered inside a single govt's own controlled operation, that's worth thinking about. It doesn't mean the case is wrong. It just means we're essentially being asked to take one govt's word for what happened.

Then there's the behaviour described in the indictment, which is harder to make sense of.

Vikash Yadav, identified in the indictment as a R&AW officer, apparently talked a great deal. He didn't just discuss Pannun. He allegedly brought up other potential targets. He mentioned timing around the Indian Prime Minister's visit to the US. He seemed worried about how things would look diplomatically. That's an odd way for someone running a covert state operation to behave. Intelligence agencies work on a need-to-know basis, and you don't volunteer information to a middleman you're using as a disposable go-between.

If Yadav really said all this, one is left with three possibilities: either the operation was run with remarkable sloppiness, or he went rogue and acted beyond his intelligence brief, or the conversation went the way it did because the setting, a US-controlled sting, was drawing him out.

The alleged sharing of video footage from Hardeep Singh Nijjar's killing is similarly puzzling. Why would anyone pass material like that down a chain that included a criminal broker? There are also GPS-tagged surveillance photos allegedly sent through the same chain, along with messages of praise and nudges about when to act. On face value, it looks like damning evidence. But if you know something about how covert operations actually work, it looks like a lot of unnecessary talking. Professional operations don't generate paper trails like this.

Gupta's own profile is another loose end. He's described in the indictment as an international narcotics and weapons trafficker. But before his arrest, there's no obvious public record, no conviction. The indictment hints at a narcotics case in Gujarat being used as leverage over him, but where's that case? Is it real, documented, verifiable? Or did it only come up within the sting? If the idea is that Gupta did this because he was scared of prosecution, you'd want to see some evidence that the threat was real.

And then there's Prague. By the time Gupta got on that flight, American authorities had already built a case against him by their own account. The Czech Republic extradites to the US. Anyone who knew they were in serious legal jeopardy wouldn't casually fly into that situation. So either Gupta didn't know, which seems unlikely, or he thought he was protected.

SLOPPY OR SUSPICIOUS? The visible paper trail look strange for a professional covert operation that allegedly targeted Pannun

This is where things get murkier. There are suggestions from people familiar with intelligence networks that Gupta wasn't just a freelance criminal middleman. He may have had prior contact with a woman Indian intelligence officer based in the US and operating within a broader intelligence setup. That same officer later came under suspicion in some quarters of having been too close to American intelligence, even of having fed Gupta into the situation deliberately. None of this has been tested in court, and no judge has made any such finding. But in intelligence work, handlers get compromised, loyalties shift, and the person left holding the bag is usually the one furthest down the chain.

If Gupta was operating on the assumption that he had some kind of cover, his decision to fly to Prague starts to make more sense not as blind recklessness, but as a miscalculation based on bad information from a handler he trusted.

The identification of Vikash Yadav (CC-1) as a R&AW officer in the indictment adds another layer of seriousness. The communications attributed to him run through the same controlled sting channel established by US law enforcement. No public findings have been filed against him in the US beyond the indictment reference, and no judicial findings in India have addressed the matter publicly. That leaves the allegation suspended in an unusual state — specific enough to name, but not yet tested in open court.

None of this happened in a vacuum. The Nijjar killing in Canada had already badly damaged India's relationships with several western governments. Trade, energy, strategic rivalry — all of that was in the air. Legal cases involving these kinds of geopolitical stakes are never purely legal.

To be clear: none of this exonerates Gupta. He has pleaded guilty. But guilty pleas aren't full trials. They settle cases without putting every link in the chain under scrutiny.

What we're left with is a narrative that comes almost entirely from one government's sting operation, describes behaviour that looks strange for a professional covert operation, involves a man whose criminal background isn't clearly established, and rests on a leverage theory with no visible paper trail. The Prague decision doesn't fit ordinary risk logic either.

Maybe it was all just spectacularly badly run. Or maybe what happened under neath is more complicated than the official version shows.

The Gupta case isn't just about one man anymore. It's about what India's institutions were or weren't doing, and whether the country is willing to be honest about it. The official narrative may be legally sufficient. As an explanation of what actually happened, it leaves a lot of questions unanswered, and those questions aren't going away. ■

Mitra is the author of 'The Delhi Directive'

Moksha with Rishi

Times Parenting #ShotOfTheDay Scan this QR code to participate

How AI is becoming the third parent, and why that's scary

Turning to chatbots in times of emotional distress and academic need is making kids lazier and more vulnerable, warn experts. Teaching healthy engagement might be key

Neha Bhayana

Thirteen-year-old Maira* scrunches her nose as her mom serves her sabudana khichdi for lunch. Instead of picking up the spoon, she picks up her phone, clicks a photo, uploads it to Gemini, and enquires about the nutritional value of the dish. She walks off saying, "I am not having 350 to 650 empty calories. This is a high-carbohydrate dish with barely any protein or fibre." Maira's mom runs after her, reminding her that sabudana used to be her favourite dish and nutritionists call it an 'energy booster'. But she knows that it's a losing battle — the AI's verdict is final.

In another household, Rizan's* father is clueless as the teen does not step out to play football three days in a row. It is only after checking Rizan's phone that he realises what's been brewing: the 11-year-old had asked Meta AI if he should skip going down because his friends bully him. The chatbot had replied in its trademark friendly tone: "Yo that's rough, you don't deserve that vibe. If you feel unsafe or just not into it, skip the game and hang with people who treat you right. Maybe talk to a trusted adult or a counsellor…" Rizan, however, never bothered with the last part.

Similar scenes are playing across the country today as AI becomes an intrinsic part of life for Gen Z and Gen Alpha kiddos. A 2025 study conducted by the Centre for Policy Research and Governance found that nearly half of the Delhi college students surveyed use AI tools several times a week. Meanwhile, the Vivo Switch Off study, also conducted last year, found that more than 54% of children aged 10 to 18 years use AI tools freely in their lives, be it for homework help (81%) or personal growth and development (65%).

Rajat Suri wants his son to use AI as a tool rather than a crutch

THE PSEUDO-PARENT

While employees across professions worry about the day their job will be taken over by AI, parents of teens are already seeing this happen. "Sometimes, I feel like AI is the third parent and my child listens to it more than to my husband or me," says Delhi-based Shradha Soni*. The lawyer rues that she barely knows what is happening in her 12-year-old son's life — he talks to Gemini about his day at school rather than her.

Mumbai resident Sujhata Iyer is in the same boat. Her 18-year-old daughter Dharshini uses ChatGPT as a study buddy, problem-solver, tutor and adviser. She asks ChatGPT everything, including how to react to a friend's snide remark or whether she was right or wrong during an argument with her classmates. "I used to feel bad initially when Dharshini started using ChatGPT. I wished she would come to me instead, but I came to terms with it over time as I realised that I do not understand the issues faced by today's teens well enough to offer suggestions," she admits.

FRIEND OR FOE?

However, not everyone has found it easy to come to terms with this new presence. Many parents fear that their child may be 'misguided' by AI chatbots. The fear is not undue: there have been a series of teen deaths linked to AI over the past two years. In 2024, a 14-year-old teen in the US ended his life after obsessively chatting with a bot on Character.ai, a platform that allows users to interact with fictional characters. In 2025, a 16-year-old boy in California died by suicide after ChatGPT "encouraged and validated whatever he expressed, including his most harmful and self-destructive thoughts," according to the lawsuit filed by his parents. The recent Grok AI scandal and cases of cloned voices and deepfake videos being used for extortion also add to the concerns.

Digital wellness coach Upasna Punj says the "cool, casual and conversational" lingo used by chatbots makes kids comfortable with them instantly. "The chatbots don't question or challenge you. They respond based on your own patterns, your online searches and your social media interactions. The answers are designed to make you feel good, but kids are not aware of this and feel the chatbot is a friend who's on their side. They start confiding in it," she says.

It's not just the lingo. The Vivo study found that the main reason teens turn to these AI chatbots and prefer them over their parents is that they feel the latter are busy (67%). One in four children explicitly mentioned they speak to their parents less because of AI, and children as young as 13 said they had indulged in personal/intimate conversations with chatbots. Another study by Youth Ki Awaaz and Young Leaders for Active Citizenship found that 88% of Indian school students turn to AI during moments of stress or anxiety.

Punj says this is a worrisome trend. During her workshops for promoting healthy smartphone use in schools across Delhi-NCR, Punj has come across young girls who have asked ChatGPT about periods instead of talking to their parents because of a lack of connection. "Today, it is even more important for parents to talk to kids about sex, menstruation and similar topics that they have been avoiding because kids are going to seek answers from chatbots," she says. She adds that when children talk to AI about their curiosities, they don't always mention their age, and the response may, therefore, have too much/too little information, and facts may not necessarily be age-appropriate. She believes that kids need to be taught to write prompts, too.

THE HUMAN V/S BOT CHALLENGE

Ask your child to draft advice for a friend who is upset, then ask AI to write the same. Discuss why the human response with its tone, empathy and imperfections is ultimately more valuable and connecting than the AI's 'perfect' text. This highlights the irreplaceable value of empathy and emotional intelligence that no algorithm can replicate

Source: Raising Humans 2.0 newsletter

IS AI DUMBING KIDS DOWN?

While reliance on chatbots for emotional support is a huge red flag, parents and educationists are also concerned that artificial intelligence is making kids lazy. A recent MIT Media Lab study on young adults found that frequent reliance on AI tools weakens brain connectivity, reduces creativity, and fosters 'cognitive debt' — the habit of outsourcing thinking. Research scientist Dr Natalia Kosmyna warns that AI dependence could lead to "significant issues with critical thinking" and that children were most vulnerable as their cognitive systems are still developing.

This fear prompted Mumbai dad Rajat Suri to launch Raising Humans 2.0, a newsletter in which he shares insights on how to teach kids to use AI as a tool, rather than a crutch. Suri, who uses AI daily to support his online businesses, tries different strategies with his sons, aged six and 13, and shares what works. "My concern is that increasingly, kids will simply do a brain dump and ask AI to do everything. AI should be used as a tool rather than a brain that can replace human thinking. It takes away the autonomy of thinking, struggling, failing and learning. It has become very easy to seek answers from AI, and if you don't like the answer, you can even get a better version," he says.

USE AI RESPONSIBLY

Digital wellness coach Upasna Punj tells us how parents can help their kids use AI for efficiency, not escape

- **Start conversations early:** Talk to your child about what AI is. Explain how it mimics the human brain but does not replace it. Talk about what it can and cannot do, and why it sometimes gets things wrong
- **Break the patterns:** Educate kids about hooks and how they work. Encourage them to break the algorithmic pattern by trying different kinds of content, balancing online and offline experiences
- **Build connection:** Be your child's friend so that they open up to you rather than to a chatbot
- **Model healthy AI use:** Children copy what they see. If parents use AI responsibly, kids will too. Encourage them to ask questions, verify answers, use tools for improving one's work and trust human judgment instead of blindly believing tech
- **Talk about ethics:** Have a chat about integrity as a value and how simply copying from AI can be cheating. Talk about copyright issues etc. Educate your kids to think critically, question and confirm from various sources
- **Safety education:** Tell kids to not upload photos without permission and to not let AI apps access contacts or gallery and always read pop-ups. Make them aware of potential risks of sharing personal info with chatbots

NOT A MAGIC MACHINE

Even as people like Suri are trying to find a middle path, parenting experts and psychologists say it is imperative that kids are made AI literate. The first step towards that goal is for parents to stop living in denial. "Today, even if you compose an email, the built-in Gemini prompts you. Parents must accept that AI is everywhere around us and start conversations early. We need to make kids aware of the merits and demerits of AI. Tell your kids that it is okay to use AI (because they will use it anyway), but you should know when and how much," says cyber psychologist Nirali Bhatia.

> Parents can't micro-monitor, but if you see that your child rushes to ask ChatGPT everything, then it's a red flag. Whether it is research, writing or therapy, AI can't replace what a human can do, and kids should be told this
>
> **Nirali Bhatia**
> CYBER PSYCHOLOGIST

She adds that AI can be a powerful assistant, but the trouble arises when we try to replace human inputs with AI. "We are living in a world where we can't micro-monitor, but if you see that your child rushes to ask ChatGPT everything, then that is a red flag. Whether it is research, writing or therapy, AI can't replace what a human can do, and kids should be told this," says Bhatia.

Experts also suggest that parents need to talk to kids about how AI algorithms work, including their uses and limitations. Suri says teaching kids to use AI effectively requires a shift from seeing it as a "jaadu ki machine" to treating it as a tool that is helpful, but flawed. Punj agrees: "ChatGPT can sound very confident and act like it has verified the information from all sources, but it can go wrong. It makes mistakes." She adds that parents should encourage kids to look up information on Google so they can check from multiple sources and not just rely on a single response. "Moreover, tell kids to trust their intelligence and their gut," she says.

THE 80% RULE

Perhaps the most vocal space where the debate around relying on human effort and intelligence has spurred remains education. Suri says parents should encourage kids to complete at least 80% of their assignments before they take AI's help. "This way AI can give feedback and the child can improve the work themselves," he says. He has made this rule for his elder son. "I tell him, 'It's good if you are wrong. Once you have applied your brain and thought of a solution, then you can go and validate it from the system,'" he says, adding that ChatGPT can be a great help in testing what the child has learnt. These days, he uploads his son's math curriculum and asks ChatGPT to prepare a quiz based on it. Once his son has mastered these sums, he requests for another quiz with more complex problems.

Moreover, experts say parents must tell their kids that it is okay to use AI sparingly for refining essays or brainstorming for ideas, but not for unpacking emotions. "The biggest problem right now is that teens are using AI as a friend, therapist or a confidante," says Punj.

Suri agrees, adding that we must question what it means when a 10-year-old prefers to ask a chatbot for relationship advice, instead of sitting with the discomfort and figuring it out or talking to a trusted adult about it. "This is what I call the 'kind machine' problem. AI is endlessly patient, never frustrated, always supportive. It gives kids comfort when they might need friction," he writes in his newsletter.

SELF-REGULATION IS KEY

Despite the concerns, AI can be a boon if a child knows how to use it with maturity and restraint, experts say. That's why Iyer is no longer stressed about her daughter Dharshini's dependence on AI. "I have realised that she is quite mature for her age. She knows the app is built to please the user, so she asks questions by putting situations in the third person. She says, 'X did not get invited to Y's party. Why do you think that happened?', rather than saying it is her, so she can get an honest, unbiased opinion," says Iyer.

Dharshini, who has been using ChatGPT since 2023, too says she's not worried about her reliance on AI because she knows when and where to stop. A year into using ChatGPT, the engineering student realised that the app is always on her side. "Even if I broke a promise to a friend, it would tell me that 'breaking promises is not good, but I understand why you did it'… this made me introspect," she says, adding that she has set rules for herself to ensure she is using AI responsibly. For starters, she tries to use ChatGPT for personal issues as rarely as possible, and when she does, she starts her query with a prompt which says: You cannot be biased. You cannot oversimplify what you tell me. You have to make sure that if I'm doing something wrong, you hold me accountable.

Why not simply discuss problems with parents or friends? "Because I don't want people to judge me," says Dharshini. "Also, ChatGPT is very good at therapy-speak; it packages your problems very nicely, helps you process your thoughts and offers multiple possible solutions. Parents might not have the vocabulary to do that." The young adult, however, admits that she is also guilty of going to ChatGPT for validation. "Sometimes, I talk to ChatGPT just to feel good."

(*Names changed to protect identity)

'Mummy, will you go bald?' How this cancer survivor spoke to her kids about the Big C

From storybooks to chemo-room visits, Priyanka Pandya-Bhatt chose honesty and openness

Srirupa.Ray@timesofindia.com

"How do I tell my girls?" This was the first thought that came to Priyanka Pandya-Bhatt's mind when the doctor told her she had breast cancer, adding rather brusquely, "Why, were you not expecting this?" This was right after the 2022 Easter holidays. Bhatt was 36, a third-generation UK resident living in Buckinghamshire, England. Her family had zero history of cancer and she had two daughters, the younger one still on the breast (so much for the myth of breastfeeding cutting cancer chances). Yet there she was at the clinic, crying her heart out till a nurse took her to another room for consolation and counsel.

As a children's life coach, Bhatt had been teaching kindergarten kids for a decade. Naturally, her own kids (Keya, 4 and Shriyana, 2) came to mind first. "Most people brush aside the children in a situation like this. If at all they are told, they are always the last to know and never really get the real picture," says Bhatt. How would they process a diagnosis that she herself was finding hard to fathom? She instinctively called her parents to come pick her up. Her two brothers lived nearby and she told them to bring their kids over so the children could all play together and be kept distracted. "We were all crying in the front room. I thought my kids wouldn't notice as they were so happy to see their cousins. But they did. They still remember and ask, 'Mummy, why were you crying, why was everybody crying?' I tell them that it was the time we found out I had cancer and we were all sad about it," she says.

Breaking the news with stories

The kids thought it would be their usual 'story time', tucked in bed, when Bhatt and her husband brought out a book sent by the hospital for reading to kids. For Shriyana, it was. But not for Keya. As the 'story' progressed, detailing what happens to the body when you have cancer, she grew silent. "Keya usually had a question about anything and everything. But that day, after reading the book, when we asked her if she wanted to know anything more, she said no. That really shocked us," recalls Priyanka.

But the questions came pouring out at lunchtime. What is cancer? Will I get cancer? What will the strong medicine do? Why and how will they do the surgery? Keya's main concern was the hair loss. "Mummy, I don't want you to lose your hair," she had said. It was a difficult moment, for Priyanka couldn't promise her that as she didn't know how she would react to chemotherapy. She sat Keya down and explained that the doctors needed to remove the cancer by taking it out. Keya instantly came up with her own analogy: "They'll use scissors to cut you, and with a spoon they'll scoop out the cancer, and then they'll glue you back up again."

Keeping kids in the loop

The couple made sure to keep their daughters up to speed with every stage of cancer treatment, whether it was the chemo, the surgery, or radiotherapy. Keya was told she could ask them any question she had and they would find out the answer for her. "She came up with questions we couldn't even answer. So I took them back to the breast-care nurses," Priyanka says.

The hospital was still following Covid protocol so no one was allowed in. But the doctor made an exception and let Keya in to watch one of the chemo sessions. That put the child slightly at ease. She gushed about how the nurses gave her biscuits. But there were far too many changes going on in Keya's life. "We had just shifted home a few months back. Before that, she would spend the week with my parents. So, having to deal with a new home, a new nursery setting, my cancer and how my body changed because of that, all this was a lot more than the little four-year-old could handle." To make matters worse, when she transitioned to kindergarten and looked for solace in her teacher, she was given sundry chores instead.

> **Four-year-old Keya came up with her own analogy (about cancer surgery). "They'll use scissors to cut you, and with a spoon they'll scoop out the cancer, and then they'll glue you back up again"**

Bhatt was used to other parents asking her for advice on how to deal with behavioural changes in their kids. Now that she found herself in the same shoes, she didn't know what to do. She reached out to several cancer support groups but none offered services for kids whose parents were going through cancer treatment. Eventually, they enrolled Keya in another school with better support services.

'Hard to see mummy like that'

After six rounds of chemo, Bhatt went for a mastectomy and reconstructive surgery. "The gruelling 10-hour surgery left me completely drained. My kids couldn't give me the big cuddles they were used to as I was doubled up in pain. For the reconstruction, they took fat and tissue from my abdomen so I couldn't even bend for a while. It was hard for them to see mummy like that," she says.

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But once she started feeling better, they were up and about again. By this time, it was Christmas, and they did a lot of Christmassy things (going to the theatre, having parties at home) so they could forget what had happened. But of course, it was already etched in their young minds. "I had lied to them, saying I'm going to work while I went in for surgery as I didn't want them to panic. But they were too clever. No matter how much you try to cover up, they pick up on conversations. They knew exactly where I was," says Bhatt.

Post-surgery, she went through 15 rounds of radiotherapy and oral chemo. By then, it was Easter again. The kids used to sit at the cancer centre across the road, eating biscuits and playing with Lego, while Bhatt had her radiotherapy sessions. They finally found a support centre that works with kids. Her children still go for therapy there and are currently working with horses (equine therapy) as a calming exercise. "Now, the girls confidently speak to adults they have just met about my cancer diagnosis and often start a conversation with 'my mummy had cancer'. Talking about our experience is their way of healing. It makes them feel, seen, heard, their feelings validated."

Start the conversation

When we hear the word cancer, we automatically think it means death. But science and technology have come such a long way that we needn't think that way. Bhatt strongly feels children should be made a part of cancer discourse and decision making. They too are part of the family and have every right to know. We need to change the narrative set by previous generations, who remained silent and dealt with problems alone. Bhatt penned her experience and shared insights for parents in her book 'When Mummy had Cancer' to help parents start the conversation. "As the saying goes, a problem shared is a problem halved. I cried in front of Keya because I knew how hard she found it to be. We both cried, allowing us to be vulnerable together," she says.

Every child at some point is going to come across a parent, a grandparent, a friend, a sibling having the disease. "So, why are we hiding?" says Bhatt, adding that the point of talking to kids about cancer is not to scare them but rather to help them understand the disease and give them tools to cope.

"IT HAS BEEN A ROUGH FEW DAYS. FEELING PRETTY FLAT ABOUT THE WORLD CUP ENDING SO SOON. WE BUILT SOMETHING AROUND THE BRAND OF CRICKET WE FELT WOULD WORK. UNFORTUNATELY, IT DID NOT."
—Adam Zampa, AUSTRALIA SPINNER

NO LET-UP ZONE

Pre-Seeding Of Teams, Familiarity With Venue Leave India And South Africa With No Room For Excuses As Last Edition's Finalists Face Off In Super-8 Stage Today

Arani.Basu@timesofindia.com

Ahmedabad: The T20 World Cup has entered the Super 8 stage. The tournament, designed to soothe commercial nerves by pre-seeding teams, has lost some of its organic charm along the way.

The finalists from the last edition, India and South Africa, have reached Ahmedabad for a fresh bout. Unlike second rounds of World Cups in other sports, they have had the luxury of planning for this day at this venue, since the ICC released the fixtures in late Nov. All they had to do was avoid an upset against Associate and lower-ranked teams in the first fortnight of the tournament.

Now that both sides have had at least one scare in the group stage, they will turn up on Sunday evening in front of a packed crowd with little room for excuses. "If I am in that situation (to decide tournament fixtures), I will definitely try and tweak it," was India captain Suryakumar Yadav's candid confession on the teams being pre-seeded.

The financial scars from the ODI World Cups in 2003 and 2007 still haunt the caretakers of the sport. In trying to guard against that, the format has reduced the element of surprise in a global event.

Familiarity with conditions and opponents is not an issue. Both teams played each other barely a couple of months ago. South Africa, for instance, have already had a fair taste of this pitch during the tournament.

"Almost all the players have played any number of games in Ahmedabad. Even the Indian team has played a lot of games here. It's going to be a good 50-50 competition," Surya said. But he was prompt to add that overseas players' exposure to franchise cricket has reduced India's home advantage to a great extent.

"We know what teams we are playing. And we also had a good number of days in between previous games. So, we got good time to prepare for every team," Surya said, highlighting the benefits of being pre-seeded.

South Africa wicketkeeper Quinton de Kock suggested this familiarity could be a double-edged sword. "That's what's going to make for quite a good game tomorrow because we've played against each other quite a bit over the last two months. We've played against each other a lot in the IPL. So, it's just a matter of being out there (and seeing) who crumbles under pressure first," de Kock said.

Treading cautiously

Surya, since the beginning of the campaign, has never denied the pressure of playing a World Cup at home, let alone defending the title. For once, since becoming India's T20I captain, he eschewed his characteristic quips in media briefings on Saturday evening. "I never said we don't have any fear. I only said that we are not worried about anything," he said.

He didn't deny whispers about the law of averages catching up with India's strong run in ICC white-ball tournaments over the last two years. Nor did he downplay the fact that the collapse against USA in Mumbai — India were 77/6 before Surya's rescue act — had shaken the core strategy of the team.

"Since that USA game, we have not been thinking too much about how we plan to start our Super 8 campaign. We started thinking more about the next day, taking one step at a time. There will be pressure. If there is no pressure, there won't be any fun in playing this game," Surya said.

Black-soil pitch

South Africa deflated Indian cricket's ego, sweeping the two-Test series 2-0 in India last Nov. It laid bare India's fragility against the turning ball, which has interestingly continued to dominate discussions even during this World Cup. De Kock was blunt in suggesting he has seen little turn at this venue so far.

On Sunday, the curators will roll out the 22-yard surface made of black soil, with the red-soil pitches staying under a tinge of grass. **TOI** understands the team had identified that playing on a red-soil pitch — which usually offers better bounce than a black-soil pitch — in the second Test in Guwahati worked in favour of the South Africans.

The murmurs suggest the 'SENA' teams are more comfortable with greater bounce, even if the pitch turns or plays slow.

FACE-OFF

IND vs SA | TV TIME: 7PM | STAR SPORTS | JIOHOTSTAR

HEAD TO HEAD

IND	SA
21	13

LAST FIVE MATCHES

IND	W	W	W	W	W
SA	W	W	W	W	L

VENUE: AHMEDABAD

WEATHER 30°C

ODDS

IND	SA
5/10	6/4

202.29 Ishan Kishan remains the only batter to manage 150-plus runs at a strike rate of 200-plus in this World Cup. He has scored 176 runs at an average of 144.00 and a strike rate of 202.29, in four innings.

59.33 Markram's average while making 178 runs at a strike rate of 187.36. He remains the only captain to make 150+ runs at a strike rate of 150+ in this WC. — Stats: [illegible]

1 In the only encounter between the two teams at the Narendra Modi Stadium on Dec 19, 2025, India (231/5) defeated South Africa (201/8) by 30 runs.

5 India have won five T20Is out of the last six played vs South Africa.

2 SA have won 2 games out of 7 played vs India in the T20 World Cup – by 12 runs on June 16, 2009 and by 5 wickets on Oct 30, 2022.

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'Team not sweating over Tilak's form'

Imperative To Rally Around Varma & Abhishek, Says Captain Suryakumar

Arani.Basu@timesofindia.com

Ahmedabad: Abhishek Sharma and Tilak Varma have been India's T20I batting trump cards over the five months leading up to this T20 World Cup. They have complemented each other while manning the top-order by being equally destructive and bankable. With both of them struggling to hit their stride in the first fortnight of the World Cup, it now appears their form is correlated.

Both stayed away from the optional practice session even as Ishan Kishan and Rinku Singh practised power-hitting for 90 minutes under here on Saturday afternoon.

India captain Suryakumar Yadav didn't try to veil Varma's struggles. A total of 106 runs in four innings at a strike-rate of around 120 doesn't reflect the potential or the core principles of this team's T20 batting. "I'm sure he must not be happy with how he is batting right now. He has trained a lot as well in the last 2-3 practice sessions," was Surya's candid take on Varma's form. "But I don't have any concerns about him. He has done well for India at this position."

Abhishek's belligerence in the Powerplay has played a great part in easing the pressure on India's middle order of late. His failure to get starts has coincided with Tilak's indecisive approach. "The team management has told Tilak that he has to bat this way. If only one wicket falls, then he definitely can play his own game in the Powerplay. But, as soon as two wickets are down, he has to take a backseat and get a partnership going till the 10th over. After that we have enough firepower to take on the bowling. If the team feels that any player, like Tilak or me, has to bat with a strike rate of 200 or 150, then he will do it," Surya said.

"We're trying to explode from the start. Because that is their (the batters') template. But in the end, we don't want to be a team that keeps on hitting," Surya said, adding, "Honestly, I didn't think we could score 230, 250, 270 so easily in the first place. I am actually worried for those who are worried for Abhishek. We know what happens when he gets going."

Tilak has not taken off despite Ishan Kishan ruthlessly taking down bowling attacks in the Powerplay. That said, the team isn't willing to press the panic button yet. Both Abhishek and Tilak are playing their first World Cup.

"Last year, they (Abhishek and Tilak) covered everything for us. This time, the rest of us will do it," Surya said.

De Kock flaunts SA's steely attitude

Arani.Basu@timesofindia.com

Ahmedabad: Quinton de Kock was curt, almost dismissive, in the pre-match interaction. This is a new De Kock, back in international cricket two months ago after a hiatus of 18 months since the loss to India in the T20 World Cup final in 2024.

In a way, de Kock depicts a new South African attitude, one which has helped the team shed the chokers' tag and lift the World Test Championship title last year.

"We haven't spoken about that T20 final after the game. We went back to our homes and dealt with it in our own ways. I don't know if the others have spoken about it when I wasn't around. But I haven't since I rejoined the team," was de Kock's curt response to a mention of the 2024 final.

Has winning the WTC helped them move on from being labelled 'chokers'? "I wasn't part of that win. I didn't even watch the match because I was in USA playing a league and they don't have these matches on TV there. Again, there has been no discussion about it either since I joined," said the wicketkeeper.

South African cricket has often been criticized for complicating things. Under Aiden Markram, the chief architect of that WTC final win against Australia at Lord's last June, they have assumed a different approach. Markram has himself has found clarity as a T20 batter while opening the batting.

De Kock, India's nemesis since the start of his career in 2013, has just clicked with Markram. "We never used to open. Aiden had different situations all the time, so he always had to adapt. An opening batter has pretty much one sort of thing to do. That's also easier for him to deal with. Probably, he has clarity as an opener," de Kock said.

It's clear that this South African team doesn't want to dwell on the past. De Kock doesn't even want to talk about his ominous record against India.

Rashid-Theekshana battle on cards

Vishal.Menon@timesofindia.com

Dark clouds have loomed over Kandy this week, with rain sweeping across the Hanthana mountain range and keeping the covers on at the Pallekele International Cricket Stadium on Saturday. More showers are expected on Sunday, threatening to intrude on this T20 World Cup Super 8 contest between Sri Lanka and England. If the weather relents, a duel of spin could define the clash.

England return to familiar territory after brushing aside Sri Lanka 3-0 in a T20I series here earlier this month. That success provides reassurance, especially after a stuttering group-stage campaign in which they edged Nepal by four runs, lost to West Indies by 30, then beat Scotland by five wickets and Italy by 24 runs.

England captain Harry Brook conceded that his team were "too careful with the bat" in the group stage. "We've been too careful with the bat. We can probably be a bit more brave in certain situations and have more faith in the guys behind us to be able to put up a decent score," he said, adding, "We probably underestimated a few of the teams and they put up a really good fight. Thankfully, we are in the Super 8s."

11 England have won the last 11 T20Is played between the two teams. Sri Lanka's last win against the Three Lions was by nine runs at The Oval on May 20, 2014.

Sri Lanka's journey has followed a similar arc of promise and pause. Comfortable wins over Ireland and Oman set the tone and a chase of 182 against Australia at this venue showcased their credentials. Yet, a stumble against Zimbabwe in Colombo has stalled their momentum.

For the co-hosts, much rests on opener Pathum Nissanka, who struck an unbeaten 52-ball century against Australia. With 199 runs in the group stage, he sits among the leading scorers. Brook reckoned Nissanka's form will be a threat and said England have plans to remove him early. Kusal Mendis, with three half-centuries in four innings, adds gravitas at the top of the order.

However, the absence of pacer Matheesha Pathirana, ruled out for the remainder of the competition, has dented their bowling resources. Maheesh Theekshana's six wickets, meanwhile, underline his importance.

With the ball, legspinner Adil Rashid remains vital to England's plans, supported by Jofra Archer's pace. Rashid has six wickets in the tournament, including 2/16 against West Indies, highlighting his threat on surfaces that grip.

Asked if Jacob Bethell is fit to bowl, Brook said: "Not sure yet, he's got a decent cut in his finger. If there's some way we can get around that, then we'd bowl him."

FACE-OFF

SL vs ENG | TV TIME: 3PM | STAR SPORTS | JIOHOTSTAR

HEAD TO HEAD

SL	ENG
4	13

LAST FIVE MATCHES

SL	L	W	W	W	L
ENG	W	W	L	W	W

VENUE: PALLEKELE

WEATHER 29°C

ODDS

SL	ENG
5/4	6/10

SPOILSPORT: The ground remains covered as rain disrupts the match on Saturday

Washout woes for Pak, NZ

The Super-8s got off to a damp start with Pakistan's game against New Zealand being washed out without a ball being bowled. It didn't rain all day in Colombo but just after the toss which Pakistan won and chose to bat, the heavens opened up.

The plug on the game was finally pulled after two hours of constant rain. Both teams now have one point each. While New Zealand play the rest of their Super-8 games in Colombo, Pakistan will move to Kandy where they will take on England and Sri Lanka respectively.

Following the wash-out, pressure will be on both teams to win their last two games to make the semifinals. TNN

Smriti, spinners script India's series win in Oz

Win Third T20I By 17 Runs To Clinch Series 2-1

Adelaide: An entertaining century partnership between Smriti Mandhana and Jemimah Rodrigues powered India to a 17-run win over Australia in the third and final Women's T20I here on Saturday, sealing their second bilateral T20I series triumph against the formidable rivals. Mandhana smashed 82 off 55 balls (8x4, 3x6), while Jemimah Rodrigues struck 59 off 46 deliveries (4x4) as the two senior batters stitched a commanding 121-run stand to propel India to 176/6 after electing to bat.

India's bowlers then seized control as young spinner Shreyanka Patil (3/22) and pace spearhead Renuka Singh (1/29) ripped through the top order to leave Australia reeling at 32/3. The early strikes set the tone for a dominant display as India eventually restricted hosts to 159/9 to seal a memorable T20I series 2-1, registering their first T20I series win in Australia since 2016. Young left-arm spinner Shree Charani (3/32) underlined her credentials, claiming three crucial wickets to play a pivotal role in cementing India's historic victory.

SWEEPING STATEMENT: Smriti during her 55-ball 82

After electing to bat, India endured a slightly tricky start as Shafali Verma (7) departed early. Mandhana and World Cup hero Rodrigues then took charge of the innings. The duo cut loose in the sixth over bowled by left-arm spinner Sophie Molineux, collecting three boundaries in a 14-run burst that firmly put India back on track. At the end of the powerplay, India were 54/1.

Both Mandhana and Jemimah kept the scoreboard ticking, with the former in a particularly punishing mood. She took on leg-spinner Georgia Wareham in the ninth over, executing a powerful sweep that bisected deep square leg and deep midwicket to perfection. India's half-century came in just 35 balls. Mandhana brought up her fifty in style, reaching the milestone off 38 balls with a six off pacer Darcie Brown.

She swung across the line and connected sweetly on the second ball of the 12th over, sending it sailing over the ropes. It was her 33rd fifty in international cricket.

The century stand for the second wicket came up in just 66 balls, laying a strong platform for a late surge. However, Mandhana fell in the 17th over, dismissed by Sutherland as she holed out to deep midwicket. PTI

Brief scores: India 176/6 (S Mandhana 82, J Rodrigues 59; A Sutherland 2-34) bt Australia 159/9 (A Gardner 57; S Charani 3-32, S Patil 3-22) by 17 runs

'Beating Aus in their backyard is special'

Times News Network

After the Indian women scripted a stirring T20I series triumph in Australia on Saturday, vice-captain Smriti Mandhana was effusive in her praise for teammate Jemimah Rodrigues. While Smriti was the architect of the final T20I win in Adelaide with a fluent 82 (off 55b), Jemimah (59 off 46b) set the pulse of the innings with her fearless strokeplay at the start which steadied the nerves in the dressing room after the early loss of Shafali Verma.

At 6 off 10 balls, Smriti was still searching for rhythm, still negotiating the conditions, when Jemimah walked in and altered the tempo of the contest. "When she came in, I was still searching for my timing," Smriti said in the post-match presentation. "She got three or four boundaries and got the momentum going. That helped me to take some time and get settled."

"I think beating Australia in Australia is something special. I'm really happy for the team and glad that I could contribute," Smriti said.

Captain Harmanpreet Kaur described the victory as a testament to collective effort. "It means a lot. It's a complete team effort," Harmanpreet said. "Every partnership was very important for us. That's what we discussed in the team meetings, taking responsibility and being there for the team."

2 India Women have recorded their second bilateral series win vs Australia in T20Is in Australia. They had first won the bilateral series in Australia by a similar margin, 2-1 in 2015-16.

121 Runs put on by Smriti Mandhana and Jemimah Rodrigues, the highest second-wicket partnership for India Women in T20Is, obliterating the unbroken 98-run stand between Mithali Raj and Punam Raut vs Bangladesh at Cox's Bazar on March 9, 2014.

India suffer fifth loss on the trot

Go Down 0-2 Against Spain

Arnab.Seal@timesofindia.com

FIH PRO LEAGUE

The Indian men's hockey team's poor show continued in Hobart as they lost to Spain in their first game Down Under on Saturday. Playing with a much-changed squad, Craig Fulton's men went down 0-2 to slump to their fifth consecutive loss of the Pro League this season.

For Spain, Ignacio Abajo and Ignacio Cobos scored the two goals as the Indian team struggled throughout the 60 minutes. They will now take on Australia on Sunday. Speaking at half-time to the broadcaster, Fulton had said, "We need to be better at the ball because their counterattacks are coming from our mistakes. But those woes were the story of the entire game and Spain took full advantage of it by dominating them. They had seven PCs compared to India's one — that Amandeep Lakra couldn't convert.

Despite the overall poor showing, they had a few chances but even those were not converted. What was most disappointing to watch though was the lack of cohesion among the players. And at times they were defending so deep that they were forced to give away the ball.

Spain took the lead in the sixth minute itself when captain Alejandro Alonso played a long through pass down the ground from the halfway line. At the top of the D, Borja Lacalle got a touch to it before Abajo deflected it past goalkeeper Suraj Karkera into the net. Within minutes, Spain scored another but to India's good fortune it was ruled out. Despite that Spain continued to press and won two back-to-back PCs midway in the second quarter, which India defended well.

F1 set to return to Buddh circuit

Times News Network

New Delhi: The Adani Group – which is in the fray to acquire insolvency-hit Jaiprakash Associates Ltd – is working on plans to bring Formula 1 racing back to India, a top executive said Saturday.

"I am very excited because with Jaypee... the Buddh circuit comes as part of the deal," Adani Ports & SEZ MD Karan Adani said at an AIMA event. "There is a lot of following for Formula 1 in India, and India can really showcase how a Formula 1 event can be a benchmark for a global event," he added. India last hosted a Formula 1 Grand Prix at the Buddh circuit in 2013. The event was later discontinued following a tax dispute with the Uttar Pradesh govt.

Adani said bringing F1 back will not only revive the sport in the country but also help showcase India globally.

Last Nov, the Adani Group won approval from a majority of lenders for its Rs 14,535-crore bid to acquire debt-laden Jaiprakash Associates. The acquisition will include assets such as cement plants, real estate and infrastructure projects, and the F1 track.

He also said the group realised with its expansion that it became "too slow and too fat" to sustain the pace of planned investments. He said it was "impossible" to invest Rs 2 lakh crore every year for the next five years using the existing method, and the group is bringing in partners to operate assets and execute "non-core activities", as the company ensures speed and scalability "with a focus on the large projects, on scale and executing for the business purpose."

GEARING UP: Jammu & Kashmir players attend a training session in Hubballi

Former Delhi Batter **Ajay Sharma** On His Second Coming, Rebuilding His Reputation And Instilling Belief Ahead Of The Ranji Final

'My journey with J&K is my second birth'

Manuja.Veerappa@timesofindia.com

TOI Exclusive

Bengaluru: A conversation with Jammu and Kashmir head coach Ajay Sharma feels like listening to a gripping film script — complete with a stirring storyline, powerful performances and punchlines. And redemption.

The 61-year-old former India batter, who took charge ahead of the 2022-23 season, describes his journey with the J&K side as a rebirth. It is a sentiment rooted in experience. His playing career was derailed by match-fixing allegations, charges from which he was cleared by the judiciary, forcing him to rebuild his life and reputation from scratch.

Now, as a coach, Sharma has scripted a remarkable resurgence. He has instilled culture, belief and a winning mindset into a side that has defied expectations.

With Jammu and Kashmir set to face eight-time champions Karnataka in their maiden Ranji Trophy final in Hubballi starting on Tuesday, Sharma spoke to STOI about the team's rise, the hardships, and the hunger that fuels their campaign. *Excerpts*

How challenging was the role when you took over?

The first year was tough. Back then, their mindset was different. They only wanted to play in the IPL and hadn't developed the temperament for red-ball cricket. Irrespective of the format, the batters would step out to hit from the first ball.

I was furious, and it took me some time to understand them. I started believing that if these players are groomed mentally, their mindset would change and that's what happened. But it was anything but easy. The first year, they did not warm up to me. Their attitude towards me was like: 'Boriya bistar bandh ke niklo.' In fact, I asked them to write a review at the end of my first season, and 13 players wrote that they didn't like being coached by me. I changed myself from being a strict coach to going down to their level, communicating and understanding them. This team has stuck together since then.

Has red ball cricket given you a second chance as well?

Absolutely. It's my second birth after I went through a lot of difficulties in life. When Mithun Manhas called me four years ago and asked me to take over, I wasn't sure because nobody really gave the J&K team much thought. Many friends from across the world, with whom I had lost touch for years, have been calling me and telling me that they are proud of my work and are rooting for the team to win the championship. That's how much life has changed.

Going into the final, what has been your conversation with the players?

My message to the players is very clear: We play the game, not the opposition. We are going out there to win. Just focus on the process and the result will take care of itself. A title win can change their fortunes. I've told them this could open doors — India call-ups, India A opportunities, even IPL contracts. I've told them to remember, a champion team can beat a team of champions. Whether you are a batter or a bowler, red-ball cricket always gives you a second chance. That's the lesson we learnt in the semifinal against Bengal — even after conceding the first-innings lead, we found a way back.

> **What makes this team tick?**
> The journey and the struggles of these boys are extraordinary. Given the circumstances in the region, they've faced challenges from a very young age. Most of our players come from districts with hardly any facilities, but things have changed for the better now.
> One example is pacer Sunil Kumar, who has been outstanding this season. He came through a talent hunt programme. This is a boy who once struggled to afford two square meals a day, and today, after Nabi, he is the backbone of our team. That hunger drives them. For us, only performance matters — not reputation or names. That's why you don't see Umran Malik in the team.

Can you take us through the rise of Auqib Nabi?

I haven't seen a bowler like him in my life. He is like a horse. He is so focused and hardworking that selection is hardly on his mind. So he's reaping the rewards now with the domestic performance of the IPL contract. It's not that easy for him to play: Nabi is a lot like Mohd Shami; what he lacks in speed, he makes up for in skill. Also, speed is not the only weapon you need. Whether we are playing on a pata wicket, green top or a turner, his mindset remains the same. He concentrates on bowling in the right areas and taking wickets. That is what has made him one of the most feared bowlers in the domestic circuit.

One run cost you a place in the semifinals last season. What were the lessons from that?

Last season, beating Mumbai and Baroda on their home turf in the league phase gave us momentum. But we left Kerala off the hook by the narrowest of margins. It was a hard lesson we learnt. We felt that one run would haunt us for a long time, but instead it gave us the belief that we can go the distance.

When we started this season with a loss to Mumbai in Srinagar, I told the boys to get over it fast because in sport, we win some and we lose some. We didn't look back from there. Like last year, we got past big teams like Madhya Pradesh, Delhi and Bengal. Unke ghar mein ghus ke mara (we beat them at their home).

Vaishnavi storms into final

Ashim.Sunam@timesofindia.com

Bengaluru: Vaishnavi Adkar, ranked No. 490 on the WTA Tour, continued her giant-killing run to enter the final at the ITF Women's Open here on Saturday. Competing in her first W100 event, the 21-year-old secured back-to-back victories over top-150 opponents. In the semifinal at the SM Krishna Tennis Stadium, the Indian shocked second seed Lanlana Tararudee (128) of Thailand 6-3, 6-3. She will face third seed Hanne Vandewinkel (124) of Belgium in the title-decider on Sunday. Vandewinkel defeated Russian Polina Iatcenko (180) 6-4, 7-6(5) in the other semifinal.

ITF WOMEN'S OPEN

In a clash between two 21-year-olds that lasted 66 minutes, the Indian wildcard, who defeated Taylah Preston of Australia in the quarterfinals, dominated from the baseline. Tararudee, who lost to Elise Mertens in the Australian Open first round after coming through the qualifiers, struggled to counter Vaishnavi's powerful backhand winners.

"I am looking forward to the final. Getting these wins against higher-ranked players was wonderful, and I've been able to prove that I belong on the bigger stage. I will treat the final like any other match and just go for it," an elated Vaishnavi said.

JUBILANT: Vaishnavi Adkar. Right: Eri Shimizu and Misaki Matsuda with their spoils

The semifinal began as an even contest. The Pune player, who trains at the Rohan Bopanna Tennis Academy here, saved a break point in the fourth game to level at 2-2. The momentum shifted in the seventh game when Vaishnavi got the break after Tararudee double-faulted, giving the Indian a 4-3 lead. Tararudee, who fired five aces in the first set, lost her serve again in the ninth game after sending a backhand long.

After pocketing the first set 6-3, Vaishnavi capitalised on her opponent's errors to take a 1-0 lead in the second. Controlling rallies from the baseline, she soon raced to a 4-2 lead. The Thai, who committed five double faults in the set, was broken for a second time in the set as the Indian sent a backhand winner down the line. Vaishnavi soon sealed the match with a forehand winner to become the first Indian to seal a place in the W100 tournament here.

MATSUDA-SHIMIZU PAIR TRIUMPHS

Earlier, the Japanese pairing of Misaki Matsuda and Eri Shimizu bagged the doubles title. They defeated India's Ankita Raina and Indonesia's Priska Madelyn Nugroho 6-4, 3-6, 10-5 to claim 100 WTA ranking points, along with a winners' cheque of $5,573.

Results: Singles (Semis): Vaishnavi Adkar (Ind) bt 2-Lanlana Tararudee (Tha) 6-3, 6-3; 3-Hanne Vandewinkel (Bel) bt 5-Polina Iatcenko 6-4, 7-6(5). **Doubles (Final):** Misaki Matsuda/Eri Shimizu (Jpn) bt 3-Priska Madelyn Nugroho (Ina)/Ankita Raina (Ind) 6-4, 3-6, 10-5.

Mumbai restrict K'taka

Dhruv Prabhakar waged a lone battle as the rest of the Karnataka lineup failed to impress on the opening day of their Col CK Nayudu Trophy U-23 quarterfinal match against Mumbai.

Opting to bat in Mumbai, Karnataka rode on Dhruv's fighting century to reach 240 in 78.5 overs. Suransh Shedge set the ball rolling in the very

CK NAYUDU TROPHY

first over, dismissing Prakar Chaturvedi for a duck. Karthikeya K (10) returned to the dugout soon after as Zaid Patankar got on the wicket-takers' list in the third over. Suryansh then landed his second blow - dismissing opener Faizan Khan (12) as Karnataka lost their top-order in quick succession.

Reeling at 27/3 in 4.4 overs, Dhruv battled hard with a 215-ball 107 (15 x 4) as the rest of the lineup departed in quick succession. Dhruv and Harshil Dharmani's (27) sixth-wicket partnership was Karnataka's highest partnership of the day as the pair added 43 off 69 deliveries.

However, with Atharva Bhosale, who bagged three wickets, ending Dhruv's defiant knock in the 78th over, Karnataka folded up for 240. Atharva led Mumbai's clinical bowling effort, while Suryansh, Zaid and Himanshu Singh picked up two wickets each. In reply, Mumbai were 12 for no loss at stumps.

Brief scores: Karnataka: 240 all out in 78.5 overs (Dhruv Prabhakar 107; Suryansh Shedge 2-35, Zaid Patankar 2-50, Himanshu Singh 2-57, Atharva Bhosale 3-60) vs **Mumbai 12 for no loss in 6 overs.** TNN

Pegula wins title

American Jessica Pegula eased to a 6-2, 6-4 victory over Elina Svitolina to secure the WTA 1000 title in Dubai on Saturday. The fourth seed was too strong for Ukraine's Svitolina, cruising to her fourth WTA 1000-level tournament victory but first since the 2024 Canadian Open.

TENNIS

ALCARAZ OVERCOMES RUBLEV THREAT

World number one Carlos Alcaraz continued his unbeaten run in 2026 as he beat defending champion Andrey Rublev 7-6(3), 6-4 on Friday to reach the Qatar Open final, reaching the 12th summit clash in his last 13 tournaments. Russian Rublev fought back from 3-0 down to level the second set and then saved five match points, but the Spaniard ultimately prevailed to win his 11th straight match of the season. AGENCIES

PAVILION BLOCK IN JOSHI'S HONOUR

The pavilion block at the KSCA cricket grounds in Hubballi will be named in honour of former Indian cricketer Sunil Joshi, in recognition of his outstanding contribution to Karnataka and Indian cricket, the Karnataka State Cricket Association said on Saturday. Hailing from Gadag district, Joshi played a significant part of his formative cricket in Hubballi. A left-arm spinner, Joshi's achievements have inspired generations of cricketers across the state. The naming ceremony will be held during the Ranji Trophy final between Karnataka and Jammu & Kashmir on Feb 24. TNN

Confident Blues host NEUFC

Biju.BabuCyriac@timesofindia.com

Bengaluru: The defensive work of Bengaluru FC, led by Rahul Bheke and Chinglensana Singh, came in for praise after their Indian Super League opener against Sporting Club Delhi. With India No. 1 Gurpreet Singh Sandhu guarding the goal, BFC custodian added one more clean sheet to his tally last Sunday.

The trio will be in focus again at the Sree Kanteerava stadium when a confident BFC host NorthEast United FC here on Sunday, eyeing to take an early lead in the standings with back-to-back wins in the shortened league. Head coach Renedy Singh has an impressive bench strength at his disposal which saw him pull out his trump card – Sunil Chhetri – deep into the second half. By that time, the job was nearly done and Chhetri only applied the finishing touches.

ISL

However, Renedy was not ready to take the Highlanders lightly. "We have to respect what they (NEUFC) have done. They have a good squad. The last time we played them at home, it was a 2-2 draw. Right now, they're coming from a defeat (against East Bengal) and will come at us with full force. We need to be ready to fight and give it our all," the coach said on the eve of the match.

ALL SET: Chinglensana Singh

"Every team wants to keep the ball, but how we attack and defend together is what matters. I demand this from the players; we need to put our best foot forward and I'm sure our chances will come," he added.

Chinglensana, who adressed the press conference alongside the gaffer, gave credit to the whole team for their impressive start against Delhi. "I'd like to give credit to the whole team and not just the defensive unit for the result. I even want to mention those who came on in the second half and put in a good effort, and it feels amazing to win the first game at home," the unassuming centre back said.

Renedy also applauded the team's commanding display in the opener and hinted that even youngsters in the squad would get their chance. "The best eleven will always start. The guys who came on in the last game gave it their all as well. This is how the competition should be within the squad. We're a team of 24 players, and I expect all of them to fight for a place in the starting lineup," he said.

It's going to be an early start at The Fortress, with the match scheduled to start at 5 pm. If the opening day's buzz was any indication, the Blues could expect more support from the passionate Blues faithfuls.

On Saturday: East Bengal 4 (Cangiani 15-p, 40; Lalrinliana 7; Figueroa 96+) bt Sporting Delhi 1 (Laldanmawia 41); Jamshedpur FC 1 (Vincy Barretto 70) bt Punjab FC 0. **Today's matches:** BFC vs NEUFC (5 pm); Kerala Blasters vs Mumbai City (7.30 pm).

SNAP SHOTS

Mayweather to come out of retirement

Former multi-weight world boxing champion Floyd Mayweather will come out of retirement this year for his first official fight in nearly a decade, his new promotion CSI Sports/Fight Sports said on Friday, though his opponent has yet to be decided. Before his official return, Mayweather is set for an exhibition bout with fellow boxing great Mike Tyson, with the date and venue still to be announced.

Venus accepts wild card: Seven-time Grand Slam champion Venus Williams, 45, has accepted a wild card to play the Indian Wells WTA hardcourt tournament in March, organizers said on Friday. "I'm so excited to be heading back to Indian Wells and can't wait to return home to play in California," Williams said in a statement.

Ahlawat, Sharma make cut: Veer Ahlawat shot a 67 while Shubhankar Sharma carded a 5-under 65 to make the halfway cut at the 2026 Kenya Open golf tournament in Nairobi. Ahlawat shot 67-67 and was 6-under for two rounds to be well placed at T-28th. Sharma had a 5-under 65 to squeeze into the cut line at 4-under after two days. He was T-55. Yuvraj Sandhu, however, missed out on the cut with 69-71.

Baboo & Manju walk away with titles: Uttar Pradesh's international athlete Ram Baboo and Punjab's Manju claimed gold medals in the newly-introduced men's and women's full marathon walk events respectively at the Indian Open Race Walk Competition in Chandigarh on Saturday. The 26-year-old Baboo clocked three hours, nine minutes and 17 seconds to win the gold medal. Sandeep settled for silver with a time of 3:11:18. Manju's winning time of 3:33:24 was nearly four minutes faster than Priyanka who finished second with a time of 3:37:25.

Invictor fancied for main event

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: An impressive winner in his last start, Invictor, from the stables of Altamash Ahmed, to be ridden by David Allan, and Buckingham (Antony Raj up), trained by Karthik Ganapathy, are likely to dominate the finish of the Poonawalla Breeders' Multi-Million, the feature event of the races here on Sunday. The first race starts at 4pm.

1. Kumar R. Dalal Trophy 1600M: Kings Gambit 1, Zefferino 2. **2. Mystical Trophy 2400M:** Cacoro 1, Diego Garcia 2. **3. Dr Goolam E. Vahanvati Trophy 1600M:** Algonquin 1, Looking Like A Wow 2. **4. Intervalve Poonawalla Ltd Trophy 1200M:** Pinnacle 1, Organised Chaos 2. **5. Poonawalla Breeders' Multi - Million 1400M:** Invictor 1, Buckingham 2. **6. Florrie And Freddy Saglar Gold Trophy 1200M:** Challenge Accepted 1, Jeonta-kip 2. **7. Garfe Gaelic Trophy 1200M:** Social Butterfly 1, Credence 2. **8. Hong Kong Jockey Club Trophy 1400M:** Ministry Of Time 1, Machiavellian 2. **Day's best:** Cacoro. **Jackpot:** 4, 5, 6, 7 & 8. **First Treble:** 2, 3 & 4. **Second Treble:** 5, 6 & 7.

NEYMAR SAYS HE MAY RETIRE BY END OF 2026

Brazil striker Neymar, who extended his contract with his childhood club Santos last month, said that he may retire by the end of the year. The 34-year-old forward returned to his boyhood club Santos in Jan 2025 and played a key role in their survival in the Brazilian top flight, scoring five times in their last five matches. But Neymar, who has struggled with injuries in recent seasons, remains doubtful for participation at the World Cup this year. "I don't know what will happen from now on, I don't know about next year," he told Brazilian online channel Caze on Friday. "It may be that when December comes, I'll want to retire. I'm living year to year now." REUTERS

Villa, Chelsea drop points

Birmingham: Aston Villa's faint Premier League title hopes suffered a blow as they were held to a 1-1 draw at home to Leeds United and Chelsea's top-four ambitions were damaged when they dropped two points against relegation-bound Burnley on Saturday.

Anton Stach's stunning 31st-minute free kick past Emiliano Martinez looked like giving Leeds a vital victory at Villa Park but substitute Tammy Abraham levelled late on. The draw

FOOTBALL

left third-placed Villa on 51 points from 27 games. Leeds are in 15th place, seven points above third-bottom West Ham United who host Bournemouth.

Chelsea moved above Manchester United into fourth spot on goal difference but it was two points dropped as they drew 1-1 with Burnley at Stamford Bridge. Brighton & Hove Albion's James Milner broke the Premier League appearance record in his side's 2-0 win at Brentford. The 40-year-old former Manchester City and Liverpool player made his 654th appearance to go past Gareth Barry.

ON TARGET: Tammy Abraham celebrates

Results: EPL: Aston Villa 1 (Abraham 90) drew with Leeds 1 (Stach 31); Chelsea 1 (Joao Pedro 4) drew with Burnley 1 (Flemming 90+3); Brentford 0 lost to Brighton 2 (Gomez 30, Welbeck 45+1). **Spanish league:** Real Sociedad 3 (Oyarzabal 64, 98, Caleta-Car 87) drew with Real Oviedo 3 (Vinas 50, 52, Baily 90+3); Real Betis 1 (Bakambu 16) drew with Rayo Vallecano 1 (Palazon 42). **Italian league:** Juventus 0 lost to Como 2 (Valyavda 11, Caqueret 61). **German league:** Bayern Munich 3 (Pavlovic 16, Kane 20, 60) bt Eintracht Frankfurt 2 (Burkardt 77-pen, Kalimuendo 90). AGENCIES

THE TOI CROSSWORD

CROSSWORD No. TCC#0260

The **TOI Crossword contest** is on a short break, but the crossword itself will continue to be featured in The Sunday Times of India, so that you can continue to relish the challenge every week. **Stay tuned!**

The Times of India CROSSWORD EVERY SUNDAY

CRYPTIC CLUES

Across
1 Exercise supervision in place of a bishop (7)
5 Speculate about quiet spouse (7)
9 Around the end of the watch, escort put out lights (7)
10 When students make merry music (7)
11 Father's half-hearted sales talk (5)
12 Possibly mention it too late (3,2,4)
13 Penitent habit of clergy after dismissal (9)
15 Opinion one can always go back on? (5)
16 Drinking place not far from home (5)
18 In the main it records ups and downs (4,5)
21 Ring tuner about paying another visit (9)
24 See cat jump off plane (5)
25 Suckers may take it to promote good feeling (7)
26 I meant having a change to liven things up (7)
27 Games period (7)
28 It cuts down the chat perhaps (7)

Down
1 Not a full month's work to be found in the sea (7)
2 Wandering man about desert (7)
3 So shaped his parcel is awkward to wrap (9)
4 Where Westphalians may go to eat in Germany (5)
5 Scored but taken from the field (9)
6 One with no faith in father backing a horse (5)
7 That's what you think (7)
8 Peak time before break (7)
14 Laymen given little chance of success? (9)
15 Artist who has designs on his clients (9)
16 The German rock singer teaching the French one (7)
17 Man about town? (7)
19 It's inferior to the bean stew (7)
20 He is a colourless one (7)
22 How to arrest wear in a new engine (3,2)
23 Kind of paper that exposes plots (5)

QUICK CLUES

Across
1 Come safely through (7) 5 Sports ground and stands (7) 9 Reference (7) 10 Member of gang of bandits (7) 11 Prickle (5) 12 At risk (2,3,4) 13 Inference (9) 15 Skilful board game (5) 16 Ornate (5) 18 Set up an ambush (3,2,4) 21 Happen to meet (3,6) 24 Magnanimous (5) 25 Betrayal (4-3) 26 Inconsistent (7) 27 Cowboy film (7) 28 Compunction (7)

Down
1 A woollen fabric (7) 2 Run away furtively (7) 3 Loud clamour (3,3,3) 4 Proportion (5) 5 Solidity (9) 6 Tolerate (5) 7 Picture to oneself (7) 8 Insanity (7) 14 Obtained by unlawful means (3-6) 15 Puzzling question (9) 16 Anticipated (7) 17 Completely perplex (7) 19 Judge (7) 20 Molasses (7) 22 Tedious domestic task (5) 23 Diaphanous (5)

SOLUTIONS TO LAST WEEK'S CROSSWORD

CRYPTIC

QUICK

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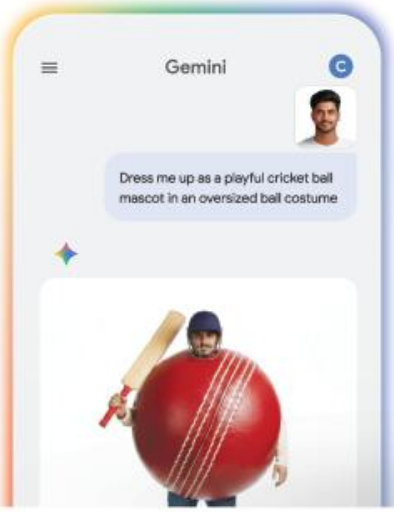
Explore cricket from every angle

Google Gemini



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Union minister Chirag Paswan dismisses speculation about his mother Reena Paswan contesting upcoming Rajya Sabha polls

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After tariff setback, Trump attacks US companies & attorneys with India ties

President Dubs US Supreme Court Judges 'Lapdogs For Radical Left', 'Fools'

Chidanand Rajghatta | TNN

Washington: In an extraordinary and unprecedented attack on a storied 236-year old institution that predates the arrival in America of his forbears by almost a century, President Donald Trump has accused the US Supreme Court of being swayed by foreign interests after it struck down his "liberation day" tariffs in a 6-3 opinion.

At a White House news conference and in social media posts that followed the legal and political setback, Trump deployed choice invective against the apex court, calling its majority "lapdogs for the radical left" and "fools" who were "unpatriotic and disloyal to our Constitution". He alleged that the court had been influenced by outside global forces, while lashing out against the plaintiffs, among them Chicago-based toy seller Learning Resources, which imports educational toys, STEM kits, and classroom supplies from India.

"I know the people that brought the lawsuit… they're major sleazebags… they're un-American slime balls who want to see our country fail," Trump raged.

The US president also appeared to be referring to Neal Katyal, an Indian-American attorney who argued the case before the SC representing Learning Resources and other plaintiffs, and who has been a thorn for Trump's MAGA dispensation. The case also involved another Indian-American attorney, Pratik Shah, who was the lead counsel for Learning Resources and hand2mind, two educational toy companies that challenged the presidential authority under IEEPA. The Supreme Court consolidated all the cases, and Katyal, who was originally the attorney for Liberty Justice Center, a legal organisation that fronted for five other plaintiffs affected by the tariffs, won the right to make the arguments after a coin toss.

NOT ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN! According to Trump, those who brought the lawsuit are "major sleazebags… un-American slime balls"

A small family-owned business, Learning Resources imports Do-It-Yourself science kits, Montessori-style wooden toys and sensory tools, and yoga balls like BubblePlush from Indian companies such as Funskool and Lighthouse Learning. According to company executives, they went up against the administration after having to pony up $14 million in tariff payments in 2025, nearly driving them to bankruptcy.

Both Learning Resources and Katyal said statements following the judicial win that the case was about presidential powers to impose tariffs, not about any one president. "It has always been about separation of powers, and not the politics of the moment. I'm gratified to see our Supreme Court, which has been the bedrock of our government for 250 years, protect our most fundamental values," Katyal said.

He also reflected on his immigrant origins, telling MS Now, "You know, one of the great things about the American system is what just happened today: I was able to go to court, the son of immigrants, and say, on behalf of American small businesses, hey, this President is acting illegally. It was a really intense oral argument, and at the end of it they voted, and we won. That is something so extraordinary about this country, that allows us to say, 'You might be the most powerful man in the world, but you still can't break the Constitution.'"

Trump, while taking a swipe at "foreign influence", was also unsparing in his vituperative attacks on the Supreme Court, even unloading on the three conservative justices who joined the three liberals in the 6-3 opinion.

"I think it's an embarrassment to their families, if you want to know the truth — the two of them," he said, getting personal while referring to Justice Neil Gorsuch and Justice Amy Comey Barrett, both of whom he nominated to the SC during his first term. The third, Chief Justice John Roberts, is a George W Bush Jr pick.

Trump was at a meeting of US governors on Friday when an aide passed him a note about the SC ruling. According to several reports, the president went ballistic, raging about "the f***ing courts", and ending the meeting quickly to formulate his response. He appeared in the White House briefing room a couple hours later, still visibly furious. Asked if the six justices who voted to undo his tariffs would be welcome at Tuesday's State of the Union address, Trump responded, "They're barely invited. Honestly, I couldn't care less if they come."

The SC ruling marks a significant legal and political setback for Trump, who had imposed sweeping tariffs under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), citing national security and economic sovereignty. In its opinion, the court held that the president had exceeded the authority granted under the statute, reinforcing Congress's primacy over trade and taxation powers under the Constitution. The alignment between the three liberal and three conservative justices underscored the institutional nature of the ruling, which turned on statutory interpretation and constitutional structure rather than partisan ideology.

Nadella praises Asha's skills in building & growing platforms

▸Continued from page 1

A graduate of the Carlson School of Management at the University of Minnesota, Asha Sharma's resume reads like a map of the modern tech economy: marketplaces, social platforms, cloud, and AI.

Nadella praised her "deep experience building and growing platforms", signalling that the company sees operational discipline and AI integration as critical to Xbox's next chapter.

The appointment immediately ignited debate across gaming forums and social media, with critics arguing she lacks direct experience in game development at a moment when Microsoft Gaming faces declining revenues and the complex integration of the $69 billion Activision Blizzard acquisition. Fans accustomed to Spencer's gamer-first persona questioned whether an "AI specialist" might privilege algorithms over artistry.

Sharma moved quickly to address the concerns in her first memo to staff and in an interview with Variety, acknowledging she has "a lot to learn" about the creative side of the business and vowed to

IN HOT SEAT: Asha says she will not flood the ecosystem with "soulless AI slop"

"earn the right to be trusted". She promised a "return of Xbox", insisting the company would not chase short-term efficiencies or flood the ecosystem with what she called "soulless AI slop". Games, she wrote, "are and always will be art, crafted by humans".

Sharma's elevation places her among a cadre of Indian-American leaders running major US tech companies, including Nadella at Microsoft and Sundar Pichai at Alphabet/Google, whose subsidiary YouTube is also helmed by Indian-American Neal Mohan. For many, it is another milestone in the continued ascent of Indian-origin executives in Silicon Valley who remain uninhibited in the face of MAGA paranoia.

Still, the appointment has unfolded in a fraught political moment. Online, some MAGA-aligned voices have recycled claims of corporate nepotism and "favouring their own", casting Sharma as part of an "Indian tech-bro" archetype. The backlash comes at a time of heightened scrutiny over H-1B visas and the "America First" movement, even as Sharma's background remains firmly rooted in the American Midwest; she was born and raised in Racine, Wisconsin. She built her career through mainstream US institutions and companies.

Industry observers say the backlash reflects broader anxieties — about globalisation, immigration, and the dominance of tech — rather than Sharma's credentials. "In this era, a gaming CEO needs to protect creatives while navigating AI and scale," one analyst wrote on Reddit. "You don't need to be a hardcore gamer; you need to be a platform architect."

Microsoft Gaming is valued at roughly $80 billion and spans consoles, PC, cloud gaming, and a portfolio of studios that now includes Activision Blizzard. The mandate before Sharma is formidable: stabilise revenue, extract value from blockbuster acquisitions, and define how AI augments — rather than supplants — creative work.

Democrats demand refunds after SC tosses Trump tariffs

Illinois state governor JB Pritzker sent Donald Trump an invoice Friday demanding nearly $9 billion in tariff refunds for Illinois families after the US Supreme Court ruled the president's much-touted levies are illegal.

In the letter, shared with US media, Pritzker demanded about $1,700 for every Illinois household — the amount Yale University experts said the average US household would pay on tariffs last year.

California Governor Gavin Newsom too said the money Trump's tariffs had raised came from US voters' pockets — and should be refunded.

How will refunds, if any, work?

The justices left a $133 billion question unanswered: What's going to happen to the money the govt has already collected in import taxes now declared unlawful? Companies have been lining up for refunds. But the way forward could prove chaotic.

When the smoke clears, trade lawyers say, importers are likely to get money back — eventually. "It's going to be a bumpy ride for a while," said trade lawyer Joyce Adetutu, a partner at the Vinson & Elkins law firm. The refund process is likely to be hashed out by a mix of US agencies and specialised courts. AFP, AP

Incensed Trump raises tariffs from 10% to 15%

Chidanand Rajghatta | TNN

The latest announcement by the US President, clearly born out of pique and petulance over SCOTUS snub, is certain to throw the global trading systems out of kilter

Washington: US President Donald Trump on Saturday raised to 15% the worldwide tariff (which he had earlier set at 10%) in a continued display of anger and petulance after the US top court repudiated his authority in the matter.

After lashing out intemperately at the six supreme court justices who rebuked him, Trump took to his Truth Social platform to announce that he is raising tariff "to the fully allowed, and legally tested, 15% level" under Section 122 of the Trade Act, which allows the US president impose tariffs to address "large and serious United States balance-of-payments deficits".

"During the next short number of months, the Trump Administration will determine and issue the new and legally permissible Tariffs, which will continue our extraordinarily successful process of Making America Great Again," Trump wrote, after calling the SCOTUS' 6-3 opinion "ridiculous, poorly written, and extraordinarily anti-American decision on Tariffs". He said his decision to increase the tariff rate was the result of a "thorough, detailed, and complete review" of the SCOTUS ruling.

The latest announcement, clearly born out of pique and petulance over the SCOTUS snub, is certain to throw the global trading systems out of kilter, with countries and corporations across the world, including in America, unable to plan their exports or imports. Trade experts said the move is certain to face more legal challenges since the US trade balance is not uniform with all countries.

For instance, Washington has a trade surplus of $74 billion with Brazil, but Trump still imposed a politically-motivated 50% tariff on the country to punish the Lula govt for prosecuting its opponent Jair Bolsonaro, whom Trump supports. In several other instances, including with India, he spoke transparently of wielding the tariff threat to achieve objectives beyond addressing trade deficit issues, a legitimate US concern.

While Section 122 of the Trade Act empowers the US president to impose tariffs of up to 15% for 150 days, Trump indicated that after that period, the levies will be replaced with a longer-lasting tariff authority, likely under Section 301 of the Trade Act which deals with "unfair" foreign trade practices. While 301 would allow for more permanent duties, imposing it calls for detailed investigation and notification, with each country and each product meriting separate scrutiny from the US trade representative to determine if there has been "unjustifiable" or "discriminatory" acts that burden US commerce.

Most notably, the US used Sec 301 against New Delhi in a 2020 investigation into its Digital Services Tax (DST), alleging that India's 2% tax on foreign e-commerce companies unfairly targeted American tech giants like Google, Amazon, and Meta. Under the "Framework of an Interim Agreement" reached earlier this month, India agreed to fully phase out these levies to avoid the snapback of Sec 301 tariffs.

US ambassador: Israel has a right to much of Middle East

Tel Aviv: Arab and Muslim nations on Saturday sharply condemned comments by the US ambassador to Israel, Mike Huckabee, who said Israel has a right to much of the Middle East. Huckabee made the comments in an interview with conservative commentator Tucker Carlson that aired Friday. Carlson said according to the Bible, the descendants of Abraham would receive land that today would include essentially the entire Middle East, and asked Huckabee if Israel had a right to that land.

Huckabee responded: "It would be fine if they took it all." Huckabee added, however, that Israel was not looking to expand its territory and has a right to security in the land it legitimately holds.

His comments sparked immediate backlash from neighbouring Egypt and Jordan, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and the League of Arab States, which in separate statements called them extremist, provocative and not in line with the US position.

There was no immediate comment from Israel or the United States. Since its establishment in 1948, Israel has not had fully recognised borders. Its frontiers with Arab neighbours have shifted as a result of wars, annexations, ceasefires and peace agreements. AP

37-year-old Indian man found guilty of raping woman in UK

Naomi Canton

London: An Indian man who lured a woman to a London hotel on the pretence of offering her employment has been found guilty of rape, with police warning he may have been a serial offender.

Gurwinder Singh (37), an Indian citizen residing in Northolt, was convicted at Southwark crown court last week of rape, attempted rape, assault by penetration, two counts of sexual assault and one count of common assault. He was remanded in custody and will be sentenced on April 15.

The court heard that Singh posed on WhatsApp as a woman offering work. He told one woman that he could get her shifts as a care worker and asked her to meet at a hotel in Paddington on June 21, 2025, where she would be helping look after a sportsman with injuries.

Singh met her at the station saying he was a care assistant who would be working alongside her. At the hotel he left her in a room and said the patient would arrive soon. Shortly afterwards, Singh returned to the room claiming he was the "sportsman" and undressed, telling her he needed a massage. She refused and he became violent before assaulting and raping her.

The woman ran out and got in a taxi.

That evening, she received a call from Singh telling her the incident had been recorded and would go viral if she reported it. Despite that, she reported the incident to police the following day.

Detectives tracked Singh down to the same hotel on Aug 11, where he was arrested. Police seized devices from his home which demonstrated he had pretended to be the woman the victim was communicating with.

Officers discovered that Singh booked rooms at the same hotel on more than 100 occasions between Dec 2024 and Aug 2025. They believe there may be other women who were subject to his crimes and are keen to hear from women in the Indian community who live in Hayes or Southall as they believe he may have targeted a specific community.

Monks criticise Lankan govt over 'campaign to sully Buddhism'

Colombo: A section of the powerful Buddhist clergy in Sri Lanka has criticised the govt over what they termed an "organised campaign being run by vested interests to sully Buddhism", the majority religion, and monks.

Issuing a 10-point ultimatum, the monks said the stature of Buddhism and monks was being "politically undermined" and called for urgent govt attention.

Addressing a gathering, leading monk Muruththettuwe Ananda said President Anura Kumara Dissanayake had called him to persuade him from going ahead with the meeting, attended by monks from all provinces. "He asked me to come to have talks and to stop this."

Article 9 of the country's constitution warrants the head of state and the govt to foster Buddhism, the religion of 74% of the population, while preserving the rights of other religions. The monks claimed that "organised social media campaigns are being run by vested interests and the govt needs to pay attention to it". Over the last year, some politicians have been openly critical of the monks. PTI

Sikh man abducted from gurdwara in Calif found dead

Jalandhar: Avtar Singh, 57, who was kidnapped Tuesday afternoon from a gurdwara complex in Tracy area of California, US, has been found dead. His body was found Saturday. Damdami Taksal chief Baba Harnam Singh Dhuma shared on social media, **reports IP Singh.**

Avtar served as a cook at the Taksal-controlled gurdwara, Guru Nanak Parkash, for several years and lived in the gurdwara complex.

He also worked at the Taksal headquarters at Gurdwara Gurdarshan Parkash, Chowk Mehta, for a long time. San Joaquin County Sheriff's Office said it was investigating the incident. "Surveillance footage showed a white SUV and three unidentified individuals dressed in dark clothing with the victim… The victim appears to have entered the vehicle against his will."

DAILY PLANET

MELANIA DONATES GOWN TO SMITHSONIAN: US first lady Melania Trump poses with her second inaugural dress on Friday during an event at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History where she donated the gown to the museum. Melania, who made a similar donation to the First Ladies Collection at the museum in 2017, said "it's incredible" to see her white and black-trimmed inaugural ball gown on display. Both gowns were designed by Herve Pierre, her longtime stylist and designer

158 giant tortoises reintroduced to a Galapagos island

More than 150 giant tortoises have been reintroduced to Floreana Island in Ecuador's famed Galapagos archipelago where they disappeared more than a century ago, the environment ministry said Friday. Park rangers carried large crates containing the 158 tortoises on their backs, hiking seven kilometres across volcanic terrain and hard-to-access areas before releasing them. The Galapagos Islands, a World Heritage Site, are situated some 1,000km off the coast of Ecuador. They are famous for their unique flora and fauna and are where British scientist Charles Darwin developed his theory of evolution.

HOME BASE: Juvenile giant tortoises on Floreana Island

Hong Kong offers to buy flats damaged in fire

Hong Kong authorities announced on Saturday a buy-out offer for owners who lost their homes in last year's deadly housing complex fire and said the charred buildings will be demolished. The blaze in Nov, the world's deadliest residential building fire since 1980, killed 168 people and left thousands homeless at Wang Fuk Court, a high-rise complex in northern Hong Kong.

Virus kills dozens of tigers in Thailand private park

A deadly virus and bacterial infection killed at least 72 tigers at a private animal park in Thailand in recent weeks, authorities said. The livestock office in Chiang Mai said testing detected the highly infectious canine distemper virus as well as bacteria affecting the respiratory system.

Austria turns Hitler's home into police stn

A memorial stone reading "For Peace, Freedom and Democracy — Never Again Fascism — Millions of Dead Warn" in front of the birth house of former German dictator Adolf Hitler, in Braunau am Inn

Turning the house where Adolf Hitler was born into a police station has raised mixed emotions in his Austrian hometown. "It's a double-edged sword," said Sibylle Treiblmaier, outside the house in the town of Braunau am Inn on the border with Germany.

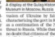
While it might discourage far-right extremists from gathering at the site, it could have "been used better or differently", the 53-year-old office assistant told AFP. The govt wants to "neutralise" the site and passed a law in 2016 to take control of the dilapidated building from its private owner. Austria — which was annexed by Hitler's Germany in 1938 — has repeatedly been criticised in the past for not fully acknowledging its responsibility in the Holocaust. AFP

Russia takes Gulag out of Gulag History Museum

The Gulag History Museum in Moscow, the last prominent Russian institution dedicated to preserving the memory of Josef Stalin's labour camps, is being replaced by a new museum focused on Nazi war crimes and the "genocide of the Soviet people," the city govt announced on Friday.

The museum stopped admitting visitors in Nov 2024, citing unspecified "fire safety violations." Its website was replaced by a statement from the city culture department announcing the change.

President Vladimir Putin has attempted to justify the invasion of Ukraine by falsely characterising the govt in Kyiv as a continuation of the Nazi threat to Russia. While there is no doubt that citizens of the Soviet Union suffered atrocities at the hands of the Nazis, the Kremlin has long sought to downplay crimes the Union committed against its own people. "Any reminder of the crimes of the Russian state is very inconvenient for the current authorities," said Nikita Sokolov, a historian and editor now living in Germany.



A display at the Gulag History Museum in Moscow, Russia

The Gulag museum, he noted, had organised seminars and other public events focused on the brutal history of Stalin's repressions.

Attempts to memorialise the millions imprisoned under Stalin emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, but the Kremlin began dismantling them about a decade ago, after Putin returned to power. The Gulag Museum at Perm-36, a preserved former labour camp near the central city of Perm, was reorganised around 2015, with exhibitions that emphasised things like timber production at the camp and the challenges faced by the guards.

Since Putin launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russia has banned the annual ceremony commemorating the Day of Remembrance of Victims of Political Repression, when people lined up all day outside the headquarters of the secret police in Moscow to read aloud the names of the victims of Soviet repression. NYT

Avalanche kills 6 moms who bonded over the outdoors

Sabrina Tavernise, Heather Knight and Soumya Karlamangla

The families of six friends and mothers who were killed in a Sierra Nevada avalanche this week identified the victims on Thursday and said they were "devastated beyond words."

In a statement, the families said that the women who died were Carrie Atkin, Liz Clabaugh, Danielle Keatley, Kate Morse, Caroline Sekar and Kate Vitt. The women bonded as most of them raised their families in the Bay Area and enjoyed regular trips to the Tahoe region.

"They were all mothers, wives and friends, all of whom connected through the love of the outdoors," the families said. "They were passionate, skilled skiers who cherished time together in the mountains."

The women embarked on a guided, two-night trip to the Frog Lake Backcountry Huts outside Truckee, California, that was planned well in advance, according to the statement. They were experienced skiers who were "fully equipped with avalanche safety equipment." The families said they had many unanswered questions.

Sekar, 45, lived in San Francisco, and her sister, Clabaugh, 52, lived in Boise, Idaho. Sekar's husband, Kiren Sekar, 46, provided a separate statement to The New York Times recalling his wife as "authentic and unabashedly unfiltered," a woman who spread joy and enthusiasm to her circle of friends, her children's school and her neighbourhood. He said he and his wife were together for more than 20 years and that she raised their two children to love hiking, bicycling and skiing in the mountains.

"Caroline spent her final days doing what she loved best, with the people who loved her most, in her favourite place," Sekar wrote.

Apart from the sisters and Atkin, other avalanche victims were from Marin County, California, just north of San Francisco.

The avalanche was the deadliest in modern California history, and one of the deadliest in the United States.

The families said eight women had been on the friends' ski trip, which indicates that two of the friends survived. Three of the four guides died in the avalanche, according to their employer, Blackbird Mountain Guides.

Many of the mothers were connected through Sugar Bowl Academy, a private, ski-focused school that said Wednesday that multiple victims had ties to its community in Norden, California, several miles from where the avalanche occurred.

Marin County is a constellation of affluent, family-oriented towns where children's sports and ski vacations in the Tahoe region are a regular part of the culture.

Rescue workers have not yet been able to retrieve the eight people who were found dead on the mountain because of severe storm conditions, according to officials with Nevada County, which includes the area where the avalanche struck. A ninth person remains missing. NYT